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New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: On this afternoon, the feast of Saint Michael, I appropriately begin by giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Micheál Martin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland.

Mr. Martin (Ireland): Mr. President, let me begin by warmly congratulating you on your election. You have my very best wishes for a successful term in office.

This is my first opportunity to address the General Assembly as Ireland's Foreign Minister. It is a great honour and privilege to do so. Ireland believes strongly in the purposes, principles and potential of the United Nations. Formed in the shadow of global war, the United Nations embodies the idea of our common humanity. We have a shared interest as well as a moral obligation to act on that common humanity in the world.

In this new century, when we speak of the international community, it cannot be as a vague platitude or as a faceless scapegoat. Global challenges confront us: climate change, economic turbulence, food and energy crises, HIV/AIDS and terrorism, among others. We can either be an international community passively divided and at the mercy of those forces, or we can be a community, in the true sense, of active participants united by our sense of mutual solidarity, our common sense of justice, our common desire for a better and peaceful future and a shared commitment to international law and the human rights of all.

The United Nations is the indispensable framework for realizing the potential of that community, as it has shown again and again. Ireland is proud to have played its distinctive part in that history and we are absolutely committed to playing a full part in its future. And let us be clear — the challenges we face have intensified in the past year.

Over the past period, we have witnessed the potential fallout from the financial crisis for all countries and not least, of course, for developing countries. The depth of their concerns has been heard from this rostrum. We have all failed as yet to reach agreement on a balanced world trade deal. Rising fuel and food prices have exacted a particular toll on the world's most vulnerable and poor. The effects of climate change, likewise, are placing a disproportionate burden on those least equipped to cope. More than halfway towards the 2015 target date for the Millennium Development Goals and despite significant progress in some areas, we have not made enough headway towards meeting them. The United Nations must continue to take the lead in those efforts, while each of us as political leaders must recognize our duty to take effective action in support of goals that are only increasing in relevance and urgency.

The world needs a strong and effective United Nations, and that is why, as a committed Member State, Ireland has long supported efforts to reform and

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improve its operation. I very much welcome and appreciate the priority that Secretary-General Ban has attached to that task. As he said when he took up office, "the true measure of success of the United Nations is not how much we promise, but how much we deliver for those who need us most" (*A/61/PV.31, p. 9*). Every Member State must play its part in ensuring that it can fulfil its role. Ireland is therefore proud of the contribution it has made to the reform process.

Most recently, we were pleased to work closely with our good friend and colleague, Tanzania, in facilitating consultations on greater system-wide coherence in the United Nations, a vitally important part of the reform agenda. I would like to take the opportunity to express my deep appreciation of the constructive spirit in which Member States and United Nations agencies and staff approached the consultation process, chaired by Ambassadors Kavanagh and Mahiga. Their report was welcomed in the consensus resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 September. A lot, of course, remains to be done. We should not shy away from issues just because they are difficult to tackle.

Taking forward the reform agenda does not, of course, mean losing sight of the real strengths and achievements of the United Nations, especially in peacekeeping. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first occasion on which personnel of the Irish Defence Forces wore the blue beret. In the five decades since, they have worn it with pride and distinction. I would like to take this opportunity to offer them and those with whom they have served my deepest personal gratitude.

Of course, as the world continues to evolve, so will our approach to peacekeeping. Regional organizations, such as the European Union, can and should be expected to play an increasingly prominent role in undertaking Security Council-mandated operations. I am particularly pleased that one such mission, the EU military operation in the Republic of Chad, is under the very effective leadership of an Irishman, Lieutenant General Pat Nash.

Last year, my predecessor expressed the hope that, after almost 40 years, it would no longer be necessary for Irish ministers to brief this Assembly on the search for peace on the island of Ireland. I am pleased to confirm that the task we now confront in Ireland is no longer building peace, but securing and underpinning it for the generations to come. Our history has, however, made us particularly conscious of the huge human cost of conflict and the moral obligation we carry to prevent and to resolve it. We in Ireland owe a debt of gratitude to all in the international community who lent their support to our search for peace. In that search, we were genuinely part of a community — concentric circles of other nations and international actors that provided goodwill and momentum, moral support, concrete assistance, independent mediation and facilitation when needed. Anchoring the process was a central partnership between the British and Irish Governments. So we know the good that can be done and we now feel a special duty to try and repay some of that debt in kind.

That is why my Government has established a conflict resolution unit within my ministry as a channel through which we can make our contribution. Its aim is to complement the work of others, especially that of the United Nations. It will, in part, draw on the lessons we have learned from our own experiences. As part of that work, Nuala O'Loan, formerly the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland, who played a significant personal role in building confidence in the new policing arrangements there, is now serving as our Special Envoy to Timor-Leste.

Ireland's commitment to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict resolution extends to removing not only the causes of conflict, but also the means. Creating a secure and stable world demands effective arms control and disarmament and the elimination of nuclear weapons. Ireland was very proud last May to host the diplomatic conference that delivered the Convention on Cluster Munitions, an historic agreement to ban the production and use of those pernicious instruments of war. The Convention is strong and ambitious. Each State party undertakes never, in any circumstances, to use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer cluster munitions, or to assist any other party in doing so. It is comprehensive and it provides for no exceptions. It sets new standards for assistance to victims and also, importantly, for clearing affected areas. I would once again like to express the deep appreciation of my Government for the constructive approach taken by Member States. Without it, such a significant step forward could not have been taken. The Convention will open for signature in Oslo in December, and

Ireland will be among the first signatories. I strongly urge all Governments to do likewise.

Peace and security must be accompanied by a firm commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights. That remains at the very core of the United Nations mandate. In this, the sixtieth anniversary year of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we must act with renewed determination to make its promises a living reality for all of our people. That means improving the United Nations capacity to tackle abuses effectively whenever and wherever they arise, ensuring a strong and vigilant Human Rights Council.

This is also the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC). It has already carved out a vital role for itself in bringing an end to impunity and in demanding that the rule of law be upheld. Ireland remains strongly supportive of the ICC and its mandate, and urges all Member States to cooperate fully with its work.

Eradicating world hunger and ending poverty is one of the most urgent tasks we face. Realizing the vision of the Millennium Development Goals is a great challenge, but it can be met. I am very proud that Ireland is now the sixth largest aid donor in the world in terms of gross national product percentage. It is, I believe, a reflection of our values of solidarity and respect for human dignity. As a committed member State, I am also gratified that the European Union and its member States continue to be the world's leading donor, accounting for some 60 per cent of the world's official development assistance.

In support of our efforts to secure the Millennium Development Goals, Ireland established a hunger task force to determine the most effective contribution we can make to tackling the root causes of hunger, particularly in Africa. Comprising 15 renowned international experts, its report was launched by our Prime Minister, Taoiseach Brian Cowen, last week with the participation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The report has highlighted three particular areas for focus. First, we need to improve small-holder productivity in Africa; the agricultural sector has been neglected for too long. Secondly, we need increased focus on maternal and infant undernutrition; a bad start makes life an uphill struggle from day one. Thirdly, the report states clearly that we do not need new commitments, but rather delivery on the ones we have already entered into. Those important messages will guide our work in the period ahead.

Let me turn now to the situation in the Middle East. The first Irish peacekeepers 50 years ago were deployed to serve with the United Nations mission in Lebanon. It is therefore a particular source of sadness to me that, despite the great efforts that have been made down the years, we do not yet have lasting peace in the Middle East, especially between the Palestinian people and Israel.

I commend the efforts of all of those who are prepared to take the political risks necessary to turn that situation around. In particular, I welcome and support the dialogue that President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have engaged in under the auspices of the Annapolis process. I hope that what they have achieved together in their talks can be built upon in the immediate period ahead, and that it will result in what we all wish to see — a just agreement, a lasting peace and a more prosperous future for their people.

Improving conditions on the ground in the Palestinian territories, including, very importantly, the economic and social situation, would, I believe, make a significant and critical contribution to creating the right context for talks to succeed. In that regard, I have called many times for an end to the construction of illegal settlements not only because it is right to do so, but also because it would send a strong and welcome signal of good faith at a difficult and uncertain time. Israel needs urgently to listen to the voice — the concerned voice — of the international community on the settlement issue.

The situation in the Sudan and the tragic suffering of the people of Darfur urgently demand our attention. I strongly urge the Sudanese Government and the rebel groups to return to the negotiating table and to engage seriously with Chief Mediator Bassolé. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur must be allowed to deploy fully and speedily, and a secure environment must be created to allow the humanitarian community to carry out its important work. A culture of impunity cannot prevail. Those responsible for human rights abuses in Darfur must be brought to justice. The Government in Khartoum must face up to its responsibilities to protect its citizens, to provide security and to ensure justice is done.

In Zimbabwe, the recent agreement to form a power-sharing Government is a moment of opportunity that must be seized. The people of Zimbabwe, who have suffered for far too long, deserve a new beginning and look to their leaders to provide it. Their leaders must not be found wanting. I look forward to the delivery of genuine power-sharing, of real political and economic reform and of the creation of a more open and free society.

In Burma, we continue to stand with the people in their demand for greater democracy and human rights, and we renew in particular our call for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and her fellow political prisoners. It is gravely disappointing that the ruling military junta has not engaged seriously with the good offices mission of the Secretary-General, or responded in any meaningful way to the concerns of the international community. International pressure must be maintained on Burma's leaders, including, and in particular, by the countries of the region.

Ireland has watched with great distress the recent conflict in Georgia, including the evidence of the use of cluster munitions against civilian populations. We warmly applaud President Sarkozy and the French presidency of the European Union for their efforts to secure a settlement. The European Union is deploying a monitoring mission to Georgia to work alongside United Nations observers, to which Ireland is proud to be contributing. We now need to see the full honouring of commitments entered into, including the full withdrawal of military forces by early October. I also urge Russia and Georgia to engage constructively and in good faith in the discussions scheduled to begin in Geneva on 15 October.

In closing, I would like to return to where I began today. As Ireland's Foreign Minister, I come here to reaffirm our strong attachment and loyalty to the United Nations. Whether we wish it or not, we are being united every day more and more by the common challenges we all face. The principles and the work of the United Nations have never been needed more. Its principles give us a firm foundation. Continuing reform will give us even stronger tools. What remains to be proven is our collective will to use them.

The vision shared by all our peoples of a peaceful and secure world, with justice, human rights and dignity for all, can be realized only in cooperation with others of like mind. For Ireland's part, we are determined not to be a passive member of that formal community of nations.

With the support and the help of others, the foundations of a future of peace have, as I have reported, been laid on the island of Ireland. We are now determined to honour that debt and continue a long tradition of active engagement in the world by contributing our energy and our initiative where we can make a difference. It is only through such a commitment by each of us and through this body that we can make the international community more than the sum of its parts, more than the sum of its fears, and instead make it what it was meant to be when the United Nations was established — the sum of all our hopes.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Mr. Mesfin (Ethiopia): I should like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency and wishing you every success in the months ahead. I pledge my country's fullest cooperation and support in the discharge of your duties and responsibilities. I must also extend my sincere appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his effective leadership in promoting global peace, security and development.

Last year, this Assembly declared and honoured the opening of Ethiopia's third millennium. We appreciate that honour. It provided a tangible foundation for the renaissance of Ethiopia, most recently symbolized by the re-erection of the Obelisk of Axum, brought back from Italy to the land of its origin, where it was carved 17 centuries ago. We are grateful to the Italian Government for that right and bold decision.

A central element of our millennium celebrations has been the initiation of numerous development activities for the war on poverty and our commitment to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As the Secretary-General has noted, progress towards the MDGs in Africa has been uneven. It is indeed alarming that no country is likely to reach all the MDGs by 2015. We are at the moment at the midway mark and we all recognize that we are behind schedule. We hope that the high-level event on the MDGs has

achieved its objective of creating global awareness and renewed commitment, with particular focus on Africa.

I concur with the Secretary-General that we are facing a development emergency. In that regard, decisive and timely action must be taken by developed and developing countries alike to live up to their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals. Food insecurity could undermine core democratic values and ruin national development efforts. Governments should therefore take the lead and work together in the economic sector to resolve the current global food crisis.

The Monterrey Consensus on financing for development, integrating aid, debt relief, market access, good governance and foreign direct investment is a litmus test for the success of global partnerships. We call on the developed countries to honour their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross national income to overseas development assistance.

The Millennium Development Goals provide the critical minimum for our survival as a nation and the basis for the profound transformation in which we are currently engaged. Ethiopia's priorities remain the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and ensuring good governance, democracy and respect for human rights. Those are not a choice, but a necessity for our survival as a nation. We have laid the foundations for continued growth and democratization, building democratic institutions from the grass roots and providing the necessary political space for responsible democratization.

Our average of 10 per cent growth over the last five years is continuing despite the setbacks of recent months. We continue protecting poverty-targeted outlays and increasing capital expenditure on infrastructure, education, health and pro-poor sectors. For the first time in its history, Ethiopia is making real and meaningful economic progress. It is the fastest growing non-oil economy in Africa.

Ethiopia is both landlocked and one of the least developed countries. Accordingly, we attach great importance to the full implementation of both the Brussels and the Almaty Programmes of Action. While we appreciate all external assistance, we are equally conscious of the need for predictable, strong and enduring partnerships for mutual benefit. We need economic relations that no longer penalize poor countries and ones that provide greater flexibility in development aid, the transfer of capital and the removal of excessive indebtedness.

The objectives of the Millennium Development Goals make it clear that global affluence and welfare are inseparable and that prosperity cannot coexist with abject poverty. In the context of the present world trading system, we urge realistic preferential terms of trade, especially to least developed countries, including quota- and duty-free market access for all their goods and services.

Ethiopia has consistently helped to promote peace and stability in our region. We have no doubt that sustainable development will be possible only with durable peace and security. Those form the very foundation of our subregional organization, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). As the current Chair of IGAD, Ethiopia is determined to ensure that its revitalization will become a reality, enhance regional integration and promote peace, security and development.

We know the dangers of continued conflict in our region. That is indeed why we have committed ourselves to peace in Somalia ever since we helped organize the first broad-based peace conference in 1992. We have consistently supported all efforts to bring about an effective Government in that country. In that regard, we are encouraged by the latest positive political developments in Somalia. The Djibouti Agreement and the Addis Ababa road map open the way for further progress in the peace process. We now look forward to the planned IGAD summit in Nairobi early next month to help Somalia's leaders do more for national reconciliation.

At the same time, we urge the Security Council to discharge its responsibility by deploying a peacekeeping mission to Somalia as soon as possible or at least by allocating the necessary resources to strengthen the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). We commend the deployment of troops from Uganda and Burundi to AMISOM. It is never too late for others to follow their example.

Ethiopia appreciates the progress made in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in the Sudan. We urge the parties to do more in overcoming the challenges facing them. However, we must emphasize that the international community should also bear its shared responsibility in that regard. Ethiopia fully supports the African Union

position on Darfur and the handling of the International Criminal Court-Sudan issue.

Ethiopia stands firmly committed to resolving all outstanding issues with Eritrea through peaceful, political, legal and diplomatic means.

Terrorism is a scourge that impedes peace and development in any part of the world. As its occurrence in any form threatens global security as a whole, Ethiopia believes that it should be addressed collectively. In that regard, we attach great significance to the ability of dialogue among civilizations to build a culture of tolerance that will enable us to create closer understanding among nations — all nations.

Ethiopia remains committed to the United Nations reform process and its revitalization. They are critical to the credibility of the United Nations and the future of multilateralism. As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ethiopia will always remain loyal to its purpose and principles.

The United Nations is the custodian of multilateral diplomacy. At no time since the Second World War have multilateralism and genuine cooperation been as critical as they are today. That is why we need the United Nations as never before. It is a body that remains vital to the future of us all, developing and developed countries alike.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Wilfred Elrington, Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize.

Mr. Elrington (Belize): On behalf of the Government and people of Belize, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. It is a distinct honour for all Central American and Caribbean peoples. I assure you of Belize's fullest support during your term of office.

I would also wish to thank your predecessor, Srgjan Kerim, for the sterling manner in which he presided over the sixty-second session. I also wish to pay tribute to our very capable Secretary-General, who works so assiduously to discharge the multifaceted responsibilities of the United Nations.

Belize accepts with pride and humility the invitation so kindly extended to us to share our vision of how we should address the great challenges of the day and how we can achieve the unity we need in order to do so effectively.

Being a very small State in a world that has long been characterized by greed, indifference, arrogance, apathy, selfishness and myopia, Belize is no stranger to crises. In our evolution from colonialism to independence, we have had far more than our fair share of them and we survived them all.

Thus, while we join in the consensus, so forcefully articulated over the past week, that never has there been a time in the recorded history of humankind that the world has been beset at one and the same time by so many crises of potentially catastrophic proportions as it is today, we remain convinced that the solution to those crises is not beyond the collective wisdom of humankind. On the contrary, we are convinced that our world leaders, who gathered within these hallowed walls this past week, possess the moral, intellectual and financial capacities to overcome the present challenges and to secure the future of our planet Earth and of all who dwell upon it. We therefore look to the future with optimism.

My Government believes that there are a number of preconditions that must be satisfied before we can hope to successfully combat the challenges we face. The first is the acceptance by all peoples that we are our brothers' keeper and that, as you, Sir, so poignantly stated, "either we treat each other as brothers and sisters or we witness the beginning of the end of our human species" (*A/63/PV.5, p. 5*).

The second and equally important precondition is the acceptance by all peoples that we are heirs to and owners of the Earth and of all the resources thereon and that no individual race or nation has a greater claim to them than anyone else. And the third and perhaps most important precondition of all is the acceptance by all peoples that our planet as we know it is not indestructible, that it can be mortally damaged, if not destroyed, by what we do to it, and that none of us would escape the consequences of such a tragic turn of events.

The experience of our own country, Belize, bears out the fact that the treatment we mete out to each other determines to a large extent our own destinies. The hardships and deprivations which Belizeans suffered in the past and continue to suffer even today have been caused in large part not by nature dealing us a bad hand but by the human exploitation and

selfishness of which we are the victims. Nature itself has been bountiful to us — so much so that our national poet, Samuel Haynes, who penned the lyrics of our national anthem, was moved to begin one of the stanzas with the following line, "Nature has blessed us with wealth untold".

Yet with all our abundant natural resources, it is very doubtful whether we will, despite our best efforts, be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015. We are not in a position to say today with any degree of certainty that by 2015 all the children in our country, boys and girls alike, will complete publicly funded primary education. Nor can we forecast that by 2015 we will attain gender equality, reduce childhood mortality by two thirds and maternal mortality by three quarters, and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

The truth is that small countries like ours are not the masters of our own destinies. We are severely constrained in what we can do to advance our own development agendas because we simply do not possess and cannot readily access the human, financial or technological resources needed to develop our people and to secure our futures. And given the predatory nature of the world we live in today, we will never be able to attain those resources using our own devices. We will most certainly need the assistance of the international community. We live in an interdependent world.

While the developed countries may possess all the human, financial and technological resources we lack, the crises which now confront us are making it manifest that not even the richest and most powerful of them can successfully withstand and combat the catastrophic consequences of nature's fury and man's excesses by relying on their own devices and resources. They must join forces with the rest of the world. That imperative was articulated by Mr. Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, on 26 September in this very Hall (see A/63/PV.11) when he stated, in essence, that every global problem requires global solutions, that we cannot solve the food crisis, climate change and the pressures on resources without involving Africa and the developing countries, and that Africa and the developing countries are not the problem but part of the very solution to today's problems.

What Gordon Brown speaks to and what many of the leaders in this general debate have highlighted is the global leadership challenge we face. In addressing that challenge, we would propose that we first examine how our multilateral institutions function. Joseph Stiglitz in his book *Making Globalization Work* wrote that:

> "The nation-state, which has been the center of political and ... economic power for the past century and a half is being squeezed today — on one side by the forces of global economics, and on the other side by political demands for devolution of power. Globalization — the closer integration of the countries of the world — has resulted in the need for more collective action, for people and countries to act together to solve their common problems."

Stiglitz continued that

> "while the nation-state has been weakened, there has yet to be created at the international level the kinds of democratic global institutions that can deal effectively with the problems globalization has created."

There is no disputing that the interests of the developing countries are poorly represented and dealt with in the present global institutions. That is clearly manifested in the multilateral trade and financial institutions, where negotiations are closeted in green rooms and where the fundamental democratic principle of one vote per country is subverted in a system that determines voting rights based on economic power. If the developing countries are to become developed, it will be imperative to revisit those structures and transform them into institutions that are representative, transparent and democratic.

In addition to the systemic issues that must be addressed, we must also tackle the crisis of implementation. If we consider the numerous conferences and summits that have been convened to craft global responses to development, sustainable development, financing for development, trade, climate change and more recently the food crisis, there is no want of commitments and common objectives.

The Millennium Development Goals promised to the world's peoples that we would take concerted action to improve the quality of their lives. The Monterrey Consensus promised a new global

partnership that would support those efforts to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable economic growth and development. The Doha Ministerial Declaration promised to put the needs and interests of the developing countries at the heart of its work programme.

But we know from the reports that our progress towards the realization of the MDGs has been slow and uneven that the realization of the Monterrey commitments has been dismal particularly on the part of developed countries and the international financial and trade institutions, and that the Doha Development Round has collapsed. Indeed, were these commitments not set down on paper, one might question their very existence.

We also know that the failure of the full implementation of our global commitments is not for want of resources but for want of compassion and empathy. Globalization may have forced the world into a closer relationship, but at the political level it has not managed to calibrate national interests vis-à-vis global interests. We therefore still act only when it is in our narrow self-interest to do so.

However, the current crises are signalling clearly that we can no longer subsume the global interests under our own. The challenges we face clearly demonstrate how our fates are intertwined. As leaders, we must start now, with a sense of urgency, to take the necessary action to deliver on the promises of development. More importantly, we must commit to submitting our actions to international oversight.

The United Nations must play the pivotal role in addressing the global leadership crisis. Belize holds the view that the way forward is for the United Nations to concentrate its efforts on convincing the leaders and peoples of the developed world that the security, development and well-being of all peoples of the world afford the best guarantee for their own security, safety and development and ultimately their very survival. It is our conviction that the adoption of that view by the developed world would prove to be the catalyst for achieving the unity that the world now needs to be able to address successfully the challenges of our day.

To that end, the United Nations must be strengthened so as better to serve to monitor the implementation of the globally agreed commitments. Its universality must be reinforced with the participation of all relevant stakeholders in its elaboration of responses to our threats and challenges. In that regard, my Government wholeheartedly supports the participation of the Republic of China on Taiwan in the United Nations specialized agencies. Finally, its decisions must carry the full weight that impels action.

The United Nations still represents the great hope for all our peoples. The principles upon which it was founded and the objectives for which it was formed are no less relevant today than they were in 1945. For my own country, our membership in the United Nations secured the hope of peace, security and development, even as we continue to struggle with a long-extant claim to our territory. It provides the framework within which we can peacefully settle our differences. Today, the Governments of Belize and Guatemala have an opportunity finally to settle that dispute by juridical means, specifically through referral to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). We have reached a major stepping stone, but we are not deluded by the challenges ahead. Not only must we negotiate a compromise for the referral of the matter, but the question of taking the claim to the ICJ must be put to national referendums in both countries. The road to the ICJ and the final resolution of the territorial difference will undoubtedly have many high tolls. Belize appeals to the international community through the United Nations for its continued solidarity and support.

Sixty years ago when we adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, humanity had been wrested from the throes of war. The Declaration confirmed in article 1 that

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

The global conscience was awakened and alerted, because our forebears knew that continued disregard and contempt for human rights and freedoms would lead to barbarous acts between peoples and nations. They foresaw the advent of a world in which human beings would enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want, and proclaimed those freedoms as the highest aspirations of the common people.

My Government holds an unflinching commitment to those values and aspirations. We are still soldiers in the battle for freedom, equality and

justice, but in fighting that battle we no longer need the crude instruments of war. Instead, we have as our weapon the power of the rule of law, cooperation and friendship between peoples and nations and an abiding faith in multilateralism. Let us be so guided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ojo Maduekwe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Mr. Maduekwe (Nigeria): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. You may remain assured of the full support and cooperation of the Nigerian delegation as you guide our deliberations. May I also express appreciation to your predecessor for the able manner in which he presided over the work of the Assembly's sixty-second session.

In his address to this Assembly last year (see A/62/PV.7), the Nigerian President reaffirmed the determination of Nigeria to remain a stable and prosperous nation, anchored on the enduring principles of democracy, good governance, free enterprise, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights. In pursuit of those objectives, we have raised the bar on bold political, economic and social reforms aimed at making our economy more investment friendly and our democracy more inclusive. We continue to count on the support and understanding of the international community, especially our development partners, as we accelerate measures to enhance the overall capacity of the Nigerian State.

A strong, safe and prosperous Nigeria means a dependable contributor not only to regional stability and well-being, but to the emergent global ethics so crucial for the survival of humanity. From the very beginning of our nationhood, our foreign policy has been tethered to a responsible and proactive role in the United Nations and its commitments everywhere. Thus, we never hesitated to respond unconditionally to demands for sacrifices whenever and wherever duty called, whether in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia or now in Darfur, and in the next few months, in Somalia. Nigeria is as safe as the rest of the world. That for us is the true meaning of global solidarity and the sense of equal partnership that informed the vision of the founding fathers of this Organization.

It is against that background that we raise before the Assembly the concern and plight of many developing countries, especially in Africa, suffering from the devastating consequences of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Most of the civil wars and insurgencies in those countries have been carried out with such weapons, and because of their lethality and ready deployment, they may be described as Africa's own experience of weapons of mass destruction.

We remain convinced that the best and most effective strategy to achieve the goal of preventing, combating and eradicating that illicit and deadly trade is through the elaboration of a legally binding global instrument, as well as the political will on the part of all to stem the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms. Therefore, urgent action is needed to criminalize oil bunkering, the sale of oil so acquired and the use of its proceeds to fuel new crisis situations in Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea, through the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The same creativity and political will that was demonstrated in confronting blood diamonds as a source of regional instability must be available at this time in dealing with the blood oil that now threatens the Gulf.

Nigeria has made enormous sacrifices on behalf of peace in Darfur. Over the years we have maintained peacekeeping troops in the region, first, under the ambit of the African Union and now under the African Union-United Nations hybrid peacekeeping force. We call on the international community to take bold and robust steps that would lead to the full deployment and operationalization of that force. In the same vein, we call on the Government of the Sudan to take steps that will facilitate the attainment of this objective.

Midway towards the target year of 2015, it has become evident that the lofty Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) might not be attained by many countries. This much is clear from the outcome of the High-level event on the MDGs that took place in the margins of this session on 25 September 2008. Mindful of the importance of these Goals for our development, Nigeria is determined to do everything to ensure their realization. In this connection, we commend the efforts of the Secretary-General in creating the Millennium Development Goals Africa Steering Group to map out strategies for African countries to achieve the targets.

It is time to urge, with the directness that these challenging times demand, evidence of a more manifest will on the part of the international

community, especially our development partners, to really assist Africa to join the rest of the global success story. Around this issue, the Nigerian delegation is looking at ten such indicators.

The first is the critical need for a big infrastructure push, especially in energy and transportation, without which nothing else is possible on the continent. Secondly, the food crisis in Africa must be addressed by redressing the trilogy of fertilizer imbalance between Africa and other regions of the world, removing food subsides in the developed economies, and transferring relevant technology for food production and food processing. Thirdly, the Doha Round of trade negotiations must be revived. Fourthly, massive investment in information technology and higher education is needed to spur development of Africa. Fifthly, strategies must be devised with African Governments on how to transform the continent's current brain drain into brain gain. Sixthly, a global commitment to stem the flow of small arms and light weapons into Africa is needed. Seventh, national Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative projects in Africa must be encouraged and supported. Eighth, there should be Security Council reforms that accord Africa permanent membership in the Council. That would ensure African ownership of its responses, since over 60 per cent of issues addressed by the Council are African. Ninth, attention should be paid to development of clean energy technology and alternative sources of energy to avert the looming disaster of climate change for a continent that is already very vulnerable. Tenth, we need a breakthrough in the malaria vaccine, together with greater sustained support for the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, two major impediments to reaching our potential in Africa.

The recent steep rise in global food prices has presented us with a monumental challenge and the global embarrassment of compounds of misery sharing increasingly crowded space with compounds of affluence in our global village. It is unacceptable that, despite technological advancements and resources unimaginable two decades ago, children still die of hunger and malnutrition. How can one say that the genius that permits us to make living in outer space feasible looks the other way when over 1 billion people in the world are going to bed hungry and more than 6 million children are dying each year of hunger and malnutrition? This problem deserves the full attention of this Assembly. The right to food for all must be pursued with renewed vigour.

Nigeria condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We reaffirm our support for the counter-terrorism measures of the Security Council and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We have also been implementing the four pillars of the Global Strategy through measures that have proven effective in combating terrorism. For us, the fight against terrorism is strongly anchored in the rule of law and respect for human rights. As we combat this scourge, it is important that, fundamental freedoms and human rights are neither compromised nor abused.

The United Nations must not relent in its pursuit of the goal of a world in which all nations and peoples live in freedom and dignity and in which all political, economic, social, cultural and human rights are fully guaranteed. Our active participation in the activities of the Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is evidence of that commitment.

In our subregion, we are concerned, that drug cartels, often based outside the region, are now targeting West Africa as a transit route for the movement of illicit drugs to other regions. The activities of those drug cartels constitute a serious impediment to development in the subregion. The world must pay adequate attention to this growing problem.

Let me reiterate Nigeria's unwavering support for the United Nations and its objectives and purposes. We are convinced that the Organization remains the most viable platform for consultations, consensus-building and action on the global challenges that we presently face. Mankind has not developed any better substitute.

Nigeria believes in the pacific settlement of disputes and peaceful coexistence with our neighbours. We showed that when, on 14 August 2008, Nigeria, in full compliance with the ruling of the International Court of Justice, lowered its flag for the last time by withdrawing from the Bakassi Peninsula. For that singular act of statesmanship, Nigeria has justifiably received the commendation of the international community. Our action accords with our long-standing tradition as a nation that honours its commitments. We believe that if we all, in concert, stand up for these shared values and purposes, our Organization and our world will be a much better place.

This can, and should be a General Assembly like no other, for the crises that face us now have few precedents in scope and complexity. What is required is a new posture to move from data to determination, from rhetoric to results and from words to wisdom. Our many noble visions must begin to somehow find more vigorous forms of expression. A world so greatly challenged must also be a world so much more capable of imagination and boldness. The platform for such boldness and such imagination is here, in this venerable institution founded 63 years ago on the pillars of peace, justice and freedom for all.

Let us never forget the timeless words of the internationalist and Nobel Laureate who warned that to deal with the problems that we have created, we need to move unto a higher order of thinking than the one with which we created them. The time to do so is now, for the clock of humanity is ticking very fast. Our existential challenge did not end with the cold war; indeed, it has just started.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Republic of South Africa.

Ms. Dlamini Zuma (South Africa): My delegation and I join in expressing our congratulations to you, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, and we hope you have a very successful and rewarding term at the helm of this body. We express our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim for the excellent work done during his tenure as President of the Assembly at its sixty-second session.

Once again, we have come to this body to reaffirm the need for what we have always called for: the implementation of all the promises and pledges that we have made before. The focus of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly is on the global food crisis, climate change and reform of the United Nations. The confluence of the food, fuel and financial crises, as well as the effects of climate change, pose the real threat that they will undermine the progress made by developing countries in the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment.

During the Millennium Summit, held in 2000, our heads of State and Government adopted a Declaration (resolution 55/2) that communicated a message of hope and a vision of a better world. Included in the Declaration was an important section on the special needs of Africa. In paragraph 24 of the Declaration, the leaders stated that they would

> "spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development".

African and many other, developing countries have indeed taken responsibility for promoting democracy, good governance, peace and stability and human rights. They are also hard at work rolling back the frontiers of poverty and underdevelopment. But, despite those strides, it is clear that many in sub-Saharan Africa will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Part of the reason is that the global partnership for development on which the achievement of the MDGs was predicated has not been fully implemented. Despite the lofty ideas expressed at previous sessions of the Assembly, we continue to fall short in meeting our commitments to implement that partnership, in particular in the areas of trade, aid and debt relief.

We express the fervent hope that the high-level meetings organized by yourself, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General, on Africa's development needs and on the MDGs, have served not only as important reminders of the challenges we face, but also as a catalyst that will cause the world to feel a greater sense of urgency.

The necessary resources exist in the world to achieve the MDGs. We need to summon the necessary political will and compassion. So we join the sister countries of our continent in calling for massive resource transfers through development assistance, investment, trade, technology transfers and human resource development. These will ensure that African and other developing countries are able to successfully adapt to the devastating impact of climate change and achieve the MDGs.

However, in order to accelerate the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals, much more attention needs to be focused on Goal 3, regarding the empowerment of women. Women need to be at the centre of development as agents of change, socially, economically and politically.

Billions of the people of the world, whom we are privileged to represent in the Assembly, have cast their eyes on this gathering of leaders. They have done so because they have hope that this leadership will take the required measures in order to address poverty and underdevelopment. We dare not fail them.

The food crisis has to be addressed in the short and medium terms. The Green Revolution that has been launched by the African Union needs partnerships in order to succeed. In addition, support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development will be a major contributor to the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment. In that context, allow me, Mr. President, to quote from your own statement to the General Assembly with regard to that socio-economic programme as well as the role of our immediate former President, Thabo Mbeki:

> "During his presidency of the rainbow nation, spanning nearly a decade, he, along [with] other African leaders, championed the vision of NEPAD we still pursue today. When the affluent listen to Africa and partner with it, that vision is within reach. To quote NEPAD's founding document: 'In fulfilling its promise, this agenda must give hope to the emaciated African child that the twenty-first century is indeed Africa's century.'" (*A/63/PV.4, p. 3*)

The Doha Development Round has stalled despite seven years of negotiations. We are convinced that trade and increased market access will make a major contribution to the achievement of the MDGs. In that regard, it is our submission that the Doha Round of trade negotiations should not be allowed to die, but must remain focused on development, as originally envisaged.

In recent years, we have all witnessed the devastating effects of climate change, especially on island States. Hurricanes have become more frequent and more vicious, together with droughts, floods and unpredictable extreme weather patterns in the rest of the world. Of course, climate change requires an urgent response. Given the agreement in Bali last year on a road map for negotiations, it is our hope that the negotiations, to be completed in Copenhagen in 2009, will necessarily set the stage for more concerted action by all countries to address climate change and all its manifestations, with the developed countries taking the lead. South Africa commits itself to approaching the preparations for Copenhagen constructively and with a view to reaching an agreement that is ambitious, balanced and inclusive.

We join the many leaders of the world who have expressed their support for fundamental reform of the system of global governance, including the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. It is important to understand that the critical issues facing the world today — the current financial, food and energy crises — cannot be addressed effectively when so many countries and regions of the world are left out of the key decision-making processes of important institutions of global governance. South Africa stands ready to work with other members of the United Nations to advance the goal of reform.

Equally, the reform of the Security Council need not be re-emphasized. We reiterate our view that a reformed Security Council would have more legitimacy and that its decisions would have more credibility. We welcome the recent decision (decision 62/557) to launch in the General Assembly inter-governmental negotiations on Security Council reform, to discuss plans for expanding the Security Council in both the non-permanent and permanent categories. It is of course a travesty of justice that Africa, which constitutes a large portion of the work of the Council, is not represented in the permanent category. Unless the ideals of freedom, justice and equality become the character of the United Nations, including the Security Council, the dominant will continue to dictate to the dominated, while the dreams of the dominated will forever be deferred.

In December this year, my country will complete its tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. We have indeed been privileged to serve the peoples of Africa and the world in that capacity; it has been a historic first for us as a young democracy. In that capacity, we were indeed honoured to contribute meaningfully to global efforts to create peace and stability in all regions of the world. Accordingly, we express the humble gratitude of the people of our country to the general membership of the United Nations for the trust placed in us in helping the world discharge this mandate.

During our tenure, the Security Council also focused on the important question of enhancing the relationship between the United Nations and regional organizations, in particular the African Union (AU).

We were honoured to be able to contribute to that work. We congratulate the Secretary-General on appointing an African Union-United Nations panel of distinguished persons whose mandate is to explore financing modalities for AU-led peacekeeping missions.

Peace continues to evade the Middle East. South Africa participated in the Annapolis Conference in 2007 with great expectations and hopes that progress would indeed be made to advance the goal of peace in that region. We will continue to support all international efforts to help the peoples of Palestine and Israel in their endeavour to find a lasting and peaceful solution to their challenges, leading to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, coexisting side by side with the State of Israel, within secure borders. We understand full well the pain, suffering and agony that conflict brings to bear on the lives of ordinary people, particularly women and children. Those ordinary souls continue to cry out to this Assembly of the world, as they have done in the past, to help bring an end to the conflict.

South Africa will continue to work with the sister peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire in their efforts to consolidate peace and democracy in their respective countries. With regard to Zimbabwe, the Assembly must certainly be aware of the recent developments led by our former President Thabo Mbeki in his capacity as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) facilitator, which culminated in the signing of an agreement between the main political protagonists in the country. We hope that the leadership of Zimbabwe win soon finalize aspects of that agreement to make possible the formation of a new Government that will help lay the groundwork to address the political and economic challenges facing their country. SADC, the African Union and the facilitator stand as guarantors of the agreement. We call on the international community to spare neither strength nor effort in lending a hand to the people of Zimbabwe as they embark on the difficult path of reconciliation and reconstruction.

Equally, the situations in Somalia and the Sudan, and especially in Darfur, remain matters of great concern. South Africa will continue to do whatever it can, both bilaterally and in the context of the African Union and the United Nations, to help the peoples of Sudan and Somalia find peace among themselves.

We remain concerned about the impasse on the question of Western Sahara. South Africa is committed to seeking a just, mutually acceptable and lasting solution to that problem.

This year also marks the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. During the past six decades, the Declaration has remained the key standard for human rights, justice and dignity. We should therefore use this anniversary period to strengthen our resolve to defend human rights. South Africa has also had the honour to be reviewed under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the new Human Rights Council. We were also honoured with the appointment of our own Justice Navi Pillai to lead that very important international institution.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We wish to reiterate our belief in the centrality of the United Nations. In the Millennium Declaration, we reaffirmed that the United Nations "is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development" (*resolution 55/2, para. 32*). Leading South Africa's delegation to the Millennium Summit was our former President, Thabo Mbeki, who reminded the Assembly that

> "Billions among the living struggle to survive in conditions of poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment ... as offensive to everything humane as anything we decry about the second millennium." (*A/55/PV.5, p. 18*)

It is that understanding that has correctly informed the engagement of successive leaders of our democratic State with this body over the years. In that regard, we are touched and humbled by the kind comments made in the Assembly by the various heads of State or Government and heads of delegation, directed at our immediate former President, Thabo Mbeki. We most certainly shall, through our Government, convey those sentiments to that noble son of our people and our continent, and citizen of the world.

Accordingly, from this rostrum may I also express our sincere gratitude to the general membership of the United Nations for the support that

former President Mbeki and our country received over the past nine-and-a-half years of his stewardship of our country. As the leadership of our country is passed on, we confirm that South Africa, under the guidance of President Kgalema Motlanthe, shall indeed continue to be a trusted and dependable partner in the common endeavour to strengthen our institutions of multilateralism, starting from the correct premise that multilateralism remains the only hope in addressing the challenges facing humanity today, whether they be terrorism, threats to human rights, peace and stability or, of course, the central struggle against poverty and underdevelopment.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Osman Mohammed Saleh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea.

Mr. Saleh (Eritrea): I wish to take this opportunity to warmly congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. He has the full support of my delegation, and I wish him every success as he guides the important deliberations of the session at this most critical time. I also wish to take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, who successfully presided over the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

These are turbulent times indeed. The world today is not getting safer by any standard. Alas, there seems to be a vortex of perennial conflicts and crises. The fires in Afghanistan and Iraq have not been extinguished; to the contrary, they continue to smoulder and intensify, punctuated by misleading, short-lived lulls. The intractable conflict situations in the Middle East are not nearer to a solution today. In Somalia, humanitarian suffering of unparalleled magnitude continues to unfold, although it remains largely ignored by the international media. Furthermore, the war in Georgia, with its potential fallout for global polarization is symptomatic of, and underscores, the extremely fragile security environment that prevails in our troubled world today.

To add to that gloomy mix, the world is also witnessing volatile and speculative fluctuations in the price of fuel oil, an unprecedented hike in food prices and a recent spate of insolvency of financial corporations that in combination are driving the global economy towards recession. Rapid climatic changes resulting from progressive environmental degradation and the resulting spell of more frequent floods and droughts, as well as pandemics that are affecting millions of people, complete the grid of the immense challenges that our global community is facing today. These multifaceted problems stem from multiple causes.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that many of those problems have been exacerbated, if not instigated, by the misguided and domineering policies of the United States Government. Indeed, the fingerprints of the sole super-Power are discernible in most of the conflict situations that are raging in many parts of our globe, with the deleterious economic, financial and humanitarian ramifications that they invariably entail.

The perplexing feature of that overarching and negative development is the emergence of the concept of management by crisis as a new tool of policy promotion. These days, candid efforts are not exerted to prevent and manage conflicts. On the contrary, crises are deliberately spawned and allowed to fester and the resulting necessity for management then provides the United States with opportunity and latitude for control, in a situation of permanent instability. The absence of countervailing forces in a unipolar world has only aggravated the situation. Principal among those is the weakness of the United Nations in pursuing an independent line and acting as a bulwark of robust multilateralism.

The strong misgivings that I have expressed are attested to by the multiple situations of turbulence that continue to unfold in our part of the world. Allow me to illustrate this grim reality through a brief description of the causes and complications of such turbulence.

In the border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, both parties had ultimately agreed to resolve the dispute through binding arbitration on the legal basis of the sanctity of the colonial boundaries. These are cardinal principles of international law enshrined in the United Nations Charter as well as in the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Furthermore, these commitments were solemnly enshrined in the Algiers Peace Agreement that was signed by the parties in December 2000. The Algiers Agreement was comprehensive in its details. Essentially, it had two components: first, confidence-building provisions and

measures through the deployment of a modest United Nations peacekeeping force; and secondly, settlement of the border dispute through final and binding arbitration on the basis of the colonial treaties and international law.

As members know, the parties went through lengthy and meticulous legal litigation in The Hague in 2001. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission — a five-member arbitration panel of international jurists — announced its unanimous final and binding decision on 13 April 2002 and made serious efforts for five years, until the completion of its work in November 2007. From November 2007 onwards in particular, Ethiopia's military presence on sovereign Eritrean territories has been one of blatant occupation. This is so because the Boundary Commission has decided to complete its demarcation functions — which were disrupted and held hostage by Ethiopia for five long years — through precise representation of the boundary by coordinates.

Throughout these years, Ethiopia's reckless acts of destabilization and aggression were supported by the United States, and they continue to be. Throughout these years, the United States not only used its formidable clout in the United Nations system to forestall appropriate measures against Ethiopia pursuant to the Algiers Agreement and that were based on Chapter VII of the Charter, but it concocted various formulas — special envoys and extensions of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), among other things — of "management by crisis", to perpetuate the conflict and derail enforcement of the Commission's legal decision.

The tragedy in Somalia is another extremely grave humanitarian situation that has been exacerbated, if not brought about, essentially because of wrong United States policies. Half a million Somalis are today displaced and living in abysmal conditions mainly as a result of Ethiopia's military invasion in 2007. Thousands of innocent civilians have been killed. United States warplanes occasionally pulverize Somali villages in the name of the war on terrorism.

Were these interventions legal or justified? The portrayal of Somalia and the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) as the epicentre or hub of terrorism was neither true nor candid. Somalis should and could have been given a chance to sort out their own problems through the reconciliation processes that they had begun in earnest. But all of those efforts were nipped in the bud through a pre-emptive invasion by Ethiopia at the instigation of the United States that resulted in massive humanitarian tragedy that dwarfs other contemporary crises in Africa.

Nor is the situation in the Sudan any different, either. While the complexities of the long and varied conflicts cannot be downplayed, the fact remains that United States policy in the Sudan is driven by other objectives and considerations. The net outcome has been and remains an aggravation of the multiple problems there, whether in relation to the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the North and South or with respect to the situation in Darfur.

Recently, the United States, which has a military base in Djibouti, has fabricated a new conflict situation between Djibouti and Eritrea to keep alive the hot spots of tension in the region. As I explained earlier, due to United States influence, the Security Council has been paralysed and rendered impotent in the face of Ethiopia's occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories, including the town of Badme. At the same time, the United States doggedly tried to use the Security Council platform during its presidency last June to fabricate a non-existent problem and establish a case against Eritrea.

All those destabilizing acts are sometimes portrayed as unavoidable consequences or collateral damage of the war on terror. The fact is that the war on terror was derailed long ago from its original objectives and intentions in order to undermine and subvert forces and Governments that do not toe Washington's line. Furthermore, the dragnet has been widely extended to involve the transparent interference of the United States in the subregional and regional organizations in our part of the world.

This untenable state of affairs cannot go on and should not be tolerated. The human sufferings have been and are too great, the time too long. Therefore, the collective international efforts to check United States excesses are timely and imperative — all the more so because those failures are widely recognized and acknowledged by significant segments of public opinion in the United States itself.

The perils of unchecked unipolarism have become glaringly obvious in the past few years. That reality can only accentuate the need to bolster the

United Nations to make it a democratic and robust institution of multilateralism through prolonged and concerted collective efforts.

The need for prompt action requires great urgency, particularly in our region. For that to happen, first of all, illegal occupation of sovereign territories must be terminated and the rule of law and the Charter of the United Nations fully respected. Secondly, the invasion of Somalia must come to an end and the perpetrators of war crimes must be held accountable. Thirdly, the interferences in and complications of the problems in the Sudan must cease, and a conducive climate must be created to bring about a lasting solution. Lastly and most importantly, United States meddling in the affairs of the Horn of Africa region, which has invariably led to the instigation of crises, must be terminated.

The consequences of failing to act are dire indeed. Unless effective measures are taken to remedy the multiplying problems that our global community is confronting today, we run the risk of further widening and exacerbating them. The situation in the Horn of Africa may in fact spiral out of control unless those destabilizing practices are brought to an end.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that our plea will be heeded so that further turmoil and suffering in our region may be avoided.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Leonard Edwards, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Mr. Edwards (Canada): I am honoured to be here today on behalf of the Government of Canada to once again reaffirm my country's commitment to a strong and effective United Nations.

(*spoke in French*)

For Canada, the United Nations remains indispensable for addressing the many global challenges that confront us today, be it the search for peace and security, the promotion of human rights, democracy and international development, combating terrorism or the protection of the environment.

(*spoke in English*)

Those challenges require collective and cooperative strategies. They cannot be tackled by any one country acting alone. That is why we must redouble our efforts to make the United Nations more effective and efficient so that it can deliver real results.

Today, I would like to speak to the Assembly about Canada's priority global engagements, and how they are helping to achieve the fundamental objectives of this Organization.

From the very founding of the United Nations, Canada has contributed ideas, action and resources to help to fulfil its mandate. We helped to develop the concept of peacekeeping. We helped it to meet the changing nature of security, when more robust action was required to end conflict, to protect civilians caught in the crossfire or to build peace in its aftermath. We have served in successive peacekeeping and peacemaking operations and today we are serving on the Peacebuilding Commission.

Today, Canada is contributing to peace and security and making sacrifices in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Haiti and the Sudan. Each of those Canadian engagements flows from a United Nations mandate.

Canada's largest and most important overseas engagement is in Afghanistan, where we have more than 2,500 Canadians on the ground in support of the Security Council-mandated International Security Assistance Force. Canada continues to call for safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need in Afghanistan. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the attack of 14 September against members of a United Nations convoy in Kandahar province who were carrying out a polio vaccination campaign for Afghan children.

Sadly, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community are all too familiar with such brutal and cowardly tactics. We will not be swayed from our efforts to improve the lives of ordinary Afghans. To that end, at the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan in Paris, Canada announced that it would make an additional contribution of $600 million for Afghanistan, bringing its overall total to $1.9 billion over the period from 2001 to 2011.

Continued leadership by the United Nations is essential in Afghanistan. Canada stands behind the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. We call on Member States to work with the United Nations to enhance the capacity of the Mission and to give it the tools required to do its job. We remain ever mindful

of the challenges that Afghanistan continues to confront — security, access to basic services and impending food shortages. Collectively, we — the States assembled here — must deliver on the promises made to the Afghan people.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada also remains committed to the promotion of security, governance and development in Haiti, efforts that are important for building a more democratic, prosperous and secure hemisphere. We consider the partnership with the United Nations in Haiti to be an integral part of those efforts. That is why we are providing the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) with civilian police officers, military staff officers and corrections experts.

Canada takes a comprehensive approach to reconstruction and development in Haiti. We are the second largest bilateral donor in Haiti, with a $555 million commitment over five years through 2011 in support of the country's long-term reconstruction and development. MINUSTAH is in Haiti at the request of the Haitian Government, the most important partner of all in a commitment we share with Member States within the hemisphere and beyond. Sustained efforts, political stability and lasting progress on reforms will combine to build a better future for all Haitians.

Canada has also been a long-standing partner of the United Nations efforts in Africa. When the Secretary-General took office, he said that one of his top priorities would be the Sudan's Darfur region. The United Nations presence in the Sudan is based on the very principles underlying the United Nations Charter. The engagement of the international community in the Sudan remains vital.

(*spoke in English*)

With contributions of over $477 million since 2006, Canada remains deeply committed to building sustainable peace in the Sudan and alleviating the suffering of those affected by the conflict. Canada's support for peacekeeping operations in Sudan includes the deployment of personnel, a loan of armoured vehicles and a large voluntary financial contribution. Canada underscores the importance of full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and calls on Sudanese authorities and the rebel movements to end the violence in Darfur, facilitate the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), cooperate with the International Criminal Court and respect human rights.

We are acutely aware that UNAMID is a difficult and often dangerous mission. In that regard, allow me to express the sincere condolences of the Canadian Government for the deaths resulting from the helicopter crash in the Sudan earlier today — a tragedy that underscores the very real threats United Nations personnel continue to confront in the field.

The current crisis in Georgia also calls for a unified international response. Canada supports the democratic and legitimate Government of Georgia and Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Canada calls on Russia to fulfil its international obligations, reconsider its actions and cooperate fully with the international community to resolve the crisis in Georgia in a peaceful manner.

Canada has consistently sought to make the United Nations instruments for promoting peace and security more effective. At the centre of those is, of course, the Security Council. Canada has long supported proposals for greater accountability and transparency of the Security Council to enable it better to shoulder the global peace and security responsibilities entrusted to it by the 192 Member States. Canada is committed to working with all Member States to promote a more unified and effective Security Council that can move past stalemate and take decisive action against threats to security wherever they may arise.

We therefore welcome the recent decision of the General Assembly to launch negotiations on Security Council reform at this session. It is important that we make progress in those negotiations. For our part, Canada stands ready to support reform that ensures that new realities are reflected in the Council while preserving accountability through the discipline of regular elections for Security Council membership.

Canada is proud to be the seventh largest contributor to the regular budget of the United Nations. We are also a member of a wide range of United Nations specialized agencies and a major contributor to United Nations funds and programmes. Humanitarianism and compassion are hallmarks of the Canadian identity. The United Nations is a key partner for the delivery of Canadian humanitarian action, with

Canadian commitments this year totalling over $315 million. Our humanitarian assistance is aimed at helping the world's most vulnerable people, including children, refugees and victims of conflict and natural disasters, and supports key United Nations programmes in those areas.

Canada is on track to meet its international assistance commitments, and we are ensuring that our aid is focused, effective and accountable. Canada will deliver on its promise to double international assistance to $5 billion by 2010-2011.

Canada is also serious about its commitment, undertaken in the Group of Eight, to double aid to Africa, and I am pleased to say that we are on target to meet that goal in 2009. Canada is also committed to working in partnership with other stakeholders to accelerate development efforts to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

In response to the global food crisis, Canada provided an extra $50 million for food aid, bringing our total contribution this year to $230 million — one of the largest in the world. Canada was also pleased to answer an emergency request from the World Food Programme (WFP) earlier this month to provide security for its food aid shipments to Somalia. A Canadian Navy frigate, HMCS Ville de Québec, is currently escorting WFP ships carrying life-saving supplies to Somalia. Canada recently extended the frigate's WFP escort mission until 23 October 2008.

Canada is taking further concrete measures to enhance the effectiveness of our aid. We recently untied 100 per cent of our food aid to make sure it can be provided in the most efficient and effective way possible to the people who need it most. Canada is also fully untying all of its development assistance programmes by 2012-2013, in fulfilment of our commitment to ensuring greater effectiveness of our international assistance.

The challenges of environmental protection and sustainable development are rightly at the top of the global agenda. The most pressing challenge is that of climate change, and the United Nations must play a central role. Canada is committed to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the need to reach consensus on a post-Bali framework.

The response to all global challenges begins at home. However, the sum of national actions must drive a collective effort at the international level. One of the most important components of the Bali Road Map is that it recognizes that no country can effectively address climate change on its own and that all countries in a position to act must do so. As such, Canada is fully aware of the importance of having all major global emitters take on meaningful and binding emissions reduction commitments in any future international agreement.

Canada is also acutely aware of the risks faced by countries most vulnerable to the impact of climate change, particularly small island States and the least developed countries. Canada is pleased to be a sponsor of a draft resolution on climate change and security put forward by the Pacific Island States. Canada has also supported global efforts to promote climate change adaptation and has contributed both expertise and finances to various United Nations and other international initiatives.

Sixty years ago, this body adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Canada is proud to recall the contribution of Canadian John Peters Humphrey in penning the initial draft of that landmark instrument. Sixty years on, we have not yet met that "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" (*resolution 217 (III)*). We have much work left to do.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Canada is working hard to make that new institution live up to the reform objectives that led to its creation two years ago. We have seen some progress and some setbacks in ensuring that the Council's agenda and focus are balanced and objective.

We must continually challenge ourselves to improve our own records. The creation this year of the Universal Periodic Review, which Canada strongly supported as an innovative improvement to the United Nations human rights machinery, is an important tool to help States identify and address their continuing challenges.

As a community, we must stand up for the rule of law and for those whose rights are violated or undermined by the very institutions that should ensure their protection. That is why Canada will continue to take strong stands against Governments that commit systemic abuses against their populations. As

Governments, we must remain committed to working together to hold each other to account on our human rights records and to support countries that are making sincere efforts to advance the human rights of their people. We must continue to strive for fundamental freedoms and human rights in order to fulfil the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada supports an effective, soundly managed and results-driven United Nations. That is why it supports broad reform. In that regard, we call for extensive reform in terms of management, especially in the areas of oversight, accountability and human resource management. Those reforms are needed to bring the management of the United Nations in step with the best practices of the twenty-first century and to equip it with the tools needed to deliver on the important mandates that we as Member States ask of it.

(*spoke in English*)

The values and ideals on which the United Nations was founded — the promotion of peace and security, of human rights and of greater prosperity for all through development cooperation — are also Canada's and we stand ready to work within the United Nations to address new challenges, such as climate change and combating terrorism. I wish to repeat Canada's willingness to work in partnership with all United Nations Member States towards the common purposes for which this Organization was created.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ouch Borith, Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Borith (Cambodia): At the outset, I wish to warmly congratulate His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I can assure him of our fullest cooperation throughout his tenure. I have no doubt that, under his able leadership, we will be successful during this session. I also wish to extend my high appreciation to Mr. Srgjan Kerim of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, for his relentless efforts in guiding us to the many outstanding achievements during the past year.

At present, we have a number of global issues and challenges that we need to address, both collectively and individually, in order to ensure a better world for all of us. Undoubtedly, peace and security remain at the centre of our preoccupation that obliges us to take responsibility first and foremost. Terrorism is a stumbling block to the advancement and prosperity of our societies and the world at large. We need to recommit ourselves and strengthen our practical measures, including putting in place a good strategy to combat terrorism at the national, regional and international levels. We must enhance at all levels the relevant existing instruments on counter-terrorism, in particular the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2006.

As for Cambodia, the Royal Government has devoted its time, energy, efforts and resources to join the international community in combating terrorism in accordance with the United Nations conventions, protocols and agreements on security cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member States, including its partners in the region. To live up to our strong commitment, the Law on Counter-terrorism was promulgated by His Majesty the King of Cambodia in July 2007, and our national mechanism in that area has been constantly strengthened.

Furthermore, our world is still marred by the spread of small arms and light weapons, which continue to have implications for our comprehensive security and livelihoods. We need to address that issue with seriousness and prompt actions. As a country that was ravaged by war and conflict for more than two decades, Cambodia experienced suffering from the use of small arms and light weapons and other weapons of war. In that regard, we attach great importance to the agreed international instruments, especially the implementation of the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Over the years, Cambodia has taken practical measures to strictly control the use and circulation of arms and ammunitions, as well as to eliminate the illegal procurement and sale of arms.

On the issue of landmines and unexploded ammunition, we are of the view that landmines are not only a security problem, but also a humanitarian one, as their innocent victims become permanently traumatized and physically handicapped, while their

families suffer untold misery of spiritual and material deprivation.

The problems of landmines and unexploded ordnance have been integrated into our national agenda — such as the Cambodia millennium development goals, the National Strategic Development Plan and the Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government of Cambodia — in order to cope with that challenging issue. Cambodia highly appreciates the valuable contributions of development partners and donors in terms of financial and material support over the years.

With our demining experience and as part of our contribution to international peace, security and development, Cambodia has dispatched its third group of 135 deminers of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces to the Sudan for mine clearance activities under the umbrella of the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

We are now confronted more than ever with increasing natural disasters, from floods to droughts, from tsunamis to storms and global warming, to name just a few that are caused mostly by climate change.

Nowadays, industrialized countries consume 75 per cent of the world's energy and produce 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, while developing countries, which produce little of such gas and have essentially agricultural economies, are the main victims of increasing global warming and continuing climate change.

According to a report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, if the temperature increases by two degrees Celsius, up to 30 per cent of plant and animal species worldwide would be at risk of extinction. However, according to a separate study of the Climate Change Policy Unit of the World Wildlife Fund, it would take only 0.1 per cent of global gross domestic product to save the world's climate, and thus our own human survival.

Fully aware of the danger and consequences of climate change and global warming on the well-being, livelihood, and development of people around the world, Cambodia has led a vast campaign of reforestation throughout our country, where 14,300 hectares were planted between 2003 and 2006. The rationalization and ban of wood-cutting have been implemented. As a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, Cambodia has made its utmost effort to implement the Convention and the Protocol, promote clean development mechanism projects, and to prepare a national adaptation programme of action on climate change. Cambodia also strongly supports the Bali Action Plan aimed at greenhouse gas reduction as well as the Japanese initiative Cool Earth 50.

We are also of the view that, to help reverse climate change, we will need to preserve nature's biodiversity as much as possible and to put an end to the ongoing deforestation in the world, especially in the least developed countries, by assisting people in finding sources of income other than deforestation.

It is also important for us to actively promote world public participation in the issue by mobilizing public awareness of the absolute necessity to work together to struggle against global warming and climate change. We should forge a shared awareness of climate change caused by industrialization, which is the other side of the coin of development. We need to mobilize the support of all countries, especially the industrialized developed nations, to respect and implement the Framework Convention and its Kyoto Protocol.

I would like to take this opportunity to call on the United Nations to organize a world summit on climate change so that the issue will remain at the top of world leaders' agendas and to ensure that concrete and timely measures and action will be undertaken to help reverse the current trend of global warming and climate change.

Concerning the Korean peninsula, we are confident that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, as well as other parties involved, will maintain the momentum in fulfilling, in good faith, the implementation of the 2005 Joint Statement for the sake of peace, stability and security in the region and the world at large.

Regarding the Middle East, the peace process has been on our agenda for long enough and we are hopeful that all parties to the conflict will have the will and the wisdom to end the conflict as soon as possible in the interests of all countries concerned. In that regard, Cambodia welcomes the 24 June 2008 Quartet statement and the ongoing negotiations between Israel and Palestine to bring about peace. Israel and Palestine must seize this opportunity to use every potential for achieving an agreement acceptable to both sides.

With regard to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight years have gone by since their adoption. We all know that the pace of achieving progress towards the MDGs is very slow and that we risk the possibility of missing the 2015 target date. The outcomes of the high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals have clearly underlined the importance for the need to continue implementing the MDGs with greater effectiveness by enhancing closer cooperation between developed and developing countries.

In that regard, there is a need to ensure greater flows of financing for development through foreign direct investment, official development assistance and more trade. At the same time, developed countries should make greater efforts to transfer innovative and relevant technology to developing countries.

For its part, Cambodia is firmly dedicated to achieving the MDGs. Various strategies for sustainable development and poverty alleviation are in the early stages of elaboration. The eight United Nations Goals have been incorporated into the framework of our National Strategic Development Plan, the Cambodian millennium development goals and the Rectangular Strategy. Over the years, with those development blueprints Cambodia experienced a double-digit economic growth of 11.1 per cent on average from 2004 through 2007 and the poverty rate dropped from 35 per cent to 31 per cent.

In addition, Cambodia is fully committed to implementing the principle of good governance and maintaining macroeconomic stability and fiscal discipline. The policy of the Royal Government of Cambodia is to conserve its domestic resources in order to finance the needs of national development.

However, domestic resources are not enough to finance investment needs for maintaining the economic growth rate at an acceptable level and as a response to key socio-economic targets, including the MDGs. Therefore, Cambodia continues to need financial cooperation from its development partners in order to support ongoing national development and poverty reduction.

For years, we have all agreed that the United Nations needs reform. Despite our concerted efforts and some progress, differences remain on how to make the United Nations more effective and more relevant in dealing with the numerous challenges we face today throughout the world. Cambodia is of the view that United Nations reform must be comprehensive and realistic. In order to move forward, we should continue to build greater consensus and uphold the common interests of all, without discrimination.

For almost 15 years now, Member States have intensely deliberated Security Council reform. Cambodia has consistently reiterated its position in support of the expansion of the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Security Council.

However, we have not yet achieved any acceptable modality and clear framework for the reform. Therefore, Security Council reform has remained deadlocked. Although we have agreed that the status quo is not acceptable, we must not lose the momentum. In addition, we need to redouble our collective efforts to ensure a breakthrough in the current impasse of Security Council reform.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Roy Chaderton Matos, chairman of the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Chaderton Matos (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): For Venezuelans, Latin Americans and Caribbeans, it is an honour, Sir, to have you as President of the General Assembly at this session. No one is a more authentic Christian than a progressive Christian. It is a risky position and one which requires sacrifice for a person like yourself, whose life has been a testament to his lofty values. Indeed, this criterion is valid for Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, animists, Hindus, atheists, and so on if their lives are a testament to their respective ethical obligations.

There is another religion whose adherents and priests preach from their temples. It is the religion of neoliberalism, whose god is the market.

A few years ago, a well-known academic, captivated by his own materialistic image, announced the end of history, claiming that we had reached not the fountain of eternal youth but the secret to eternal prosperity. Today, prompted by the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we qualify that thought as a curse that reflects the insensitivity of the most egotistical and corrupt.

At the time of the French Revolution someone said "Freedom, how many crimes are committed in your name?" These days we could say "Free market,

how much poverty, how much violence, how much torture, how many wars, how many invasions, how much oppression, how much social injustice is committed in your name?" We are, therefore, sympathetic with President Nicolas Sarkozy's peace initiatives and his appropriate ideas about a regulated capitalism and a summit of countries affected by the financial crisis.

Accustomed as we were to suffering the perverse effects of the brutal application of neoliberal policies, today we see the pain, anguish and anger of millions of our brothers in the United States. They have been swindled by upper-class criminals, an experience that we Venezuelans know well.

Since memory is fragile and the neoliberal global dictatorship uses private communications media to hide its crimes, allow me to recount a terrible event that occurred in the country that was the first lab rat for the most radical formula from Wall Street and the International Monetary Fund. I am speaking of my country, Venezuela.

In only two days, in February 1989, a spontaneous people's rebellion was mercilessly crushed. It was a protest against the application, without anaesthesia, of the magic formulas that the great financial centres imposed on us. Several non-governmental human rights organizations at the time registered thousands of deaths, but the official statistics recognized only 259 dead, without mentioning those who were injured or material damage — only 259 dead in two days.

As a diplomat in those terrible days, I assumed that there would be complaints and condemnations from friendly Governments with good human-rights track records. Nothing of the sort happened. Venezuela was the pet project of Latin American democracies and, at the same time, a neoliberal laboratory whose failure had to be kept secret. The media accomplices of yesterday that kept these crimes secret are the same that today slander the democratic, peaceful, socialist revolutionary Venezuelan process led by President Hugo Chávez.

In Venezuela we practice extreme democracy: extreme freedom of expression, extreme participation, extreme challenge to the neoliberal monster and extreme commitment to social justice, hence the international media campaign to attempt to slander and stifle democracy in Venezuela. The instruments of that campaign have a name: the Fox network in the United States; the Grupo de Diarios de América, the Inter American Press Association, the neocolonialist group Promotora de Informaciones, S.A., the *El Pais* daily, the Cadena de Ondas Populares de España (COPE) radio network of the blessed Catholic Bishops' Conference of Spain, the *El Mercurio* daily in Chile, the *El Universal* daily in Mexico, the pro-coup Venezuelan television station Globovision, and many other lackeys of the international far right.

That brings to mind a topic that no one talks about. Some people think that Nelson Mandela did away with apartheid. In the United States, the people we see on the television screens are like the people we see in the streets. Not so in Latin America, in Venezuela and in multi-ethnic Latin American countries. On their televisions we do not see people of mixed races, nor indigenous people, nor Afro-Latin Americans unless they are playing the role of the servants. Hence the racist hatred against the indigenous majority in Bolivia. Racism is the most perverse form of discrimination. In the worst dictatorships and under persecution, it is possible to hide one's thoughts, faith and political affiliation. But what one can never hide is the colour of one's skin.

Democracy, international social justice and peace cannot survive under the schemes of unilateralism and the muscular exercises of hegemonic powers. Dissent should not be punished but rather recognized as an expression of democratic and pacifist values. Appreciation of and respect for those who are different is a guarantee of the fulfilment of the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Democracy and peace should stem from creativity and the confidence generated by the variety of ideas, colours, interests and proposals.

Progressive democracy has burgeoned in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly within the past 10 years, just as the continent has been undergoing profound social change. Long ago, during the sixties and seventies, the magic solution to attain the complete democracy and social progress that some preached was through free and transparent elections, although in certain select circumstances the elections were neither very democratic nor very transparent. Nevertheless, they were welcomed into the so-called democratic club, since they adhered to unspoken patterns of political behaviour dictated by the global metropolis.

It is a fact that today in Latin America elections are more participatory, more transparent and freer than ever. Nevertheless, the results are not welcomed when the winners have previously been labelled as villains by the imperial super-Power.

The spectre of progressive democracy is lying in wait for the continent of social injustice. People are deciding their own destiny, as they should. But they are making this choice with a clear preference for leftist movements that offer a response to their circumstances. That does not suit the far right, which is no lover of democracy, as much as it claims to be.

That reminds me to some extent of Henry Ford, when he spoke of his great success in selling the Model T. He said "Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black". Something similar is happening with the super-Power and its partners on our continent. Anyone who wins free and transparent elections monitored by credible international observers is accepted, provided that person is right-wing.

Dissent is not accepted by some people in the global village. The new movements, which are supported by the majority of those who are excluded, are not welcome. The magnates of private media are themselves a threat to democracy and freedom, aligning themselves with the interests they serve, while poisoning the collective psyche of the more timid groups in society.

Concerted efforts to undermine legitimate institutions are being launched and consolidated under fundamentalist doctrines. New witch hunts identify that phenomenon, and the fundamentalists of the right are embarking on well-coordinated and well-financed ventures while continuing to sign off on huge corporate deals. Such is the case with the Halliburton company, whose balance sheets are spattered with Arab and American blood. All the while, Al Qaeda is bigger than ever, and the weapons of mass destruction have still not been found.

Homegrown right-wing and racist forces, emboldened by foreign support, do not recognize the legitimacy of new or renewed institutions and cause political and social instability and separatism. Look at Bolivia. In Ecuador, those groups will not accept the overwhelming popular support provided yesterday to President Correa's draft constitution, so we will have to invite him to come in and join the axis of evil.

In any case, there is not much to worry about when it comes to the leftist democracies. They are very modern, in the sense that they do not have religious or gender police, while on the other hand they are antiquated democracies, where those who gain the most votes come in first and are elected.

The drama of poverty, social exclusion and uneven distribution of income still tyrannizes our countries. The current model of development is not sustainable. It endangers life, the planet and peace. As long as there is still hunger, our democracies and our environment are threatened. The time for profound and demanding changes has come. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his address to this Assembly at its 5th meeting, referred to the need for a new understanding on business ethics, with more compassion and less unconditional faith in the magic of the markets. Greed and consumerism have brought about climate change, the energy crisis, financial chaos and the food crisis.

The world food crisis continues to expand. Food has become just a form of merchandise used to maximize profits, with the human right to food ignored. According to the statistics of the Food and Agriculture Organization, global food production has consistently exceeded global population growth. That means that sufficient food is produced in the world to provide more than 2,800 calories every day to each of the world's inhabitants. Close to 18 per cent more calories are produced per person than was the case in the 1960s, despite the increase in the total population. If sufficient food is produced in the world, how can we explain the fact that more than 850 million people now suffer from hunger or malnutrition, that 25,000 people die from hunger every day and that 18,000 of those are children?

The Secretary-General has stated that development is in a state of emergency, and he continues to appeal for progress on the Millennium Development Goals.

Venezuela promotes policies for social inclusion, public policies to ensure everyone's rights. In order to build a new model for development on the basis of solidarity, social justice, equity, cooperation, respect for human rights and the participation of the people, Venezuela has a comprehensive social development policy based on the human being. The foundation of that policy is social missions undertaken through wide-ranging and free social and economic programmes to

reach out to all sectors of society, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable, in order to guarantee the social and economic rights of our people in peace and democracy.

With great satisfaction and humility, our country can share with the Assembly the progress we have achieved in implementing the Millennium Development Goals. The number of people in extreme poverty has dropped in our country, and there has been an increase of 10.8 per cent in primary school attendance. Unemployment has dropped from 23 per cent to 7 per cent. In recent years, gross domestic product expenditures on health have increased by 57.1 per cent. We provide total coverage to those suffering from AIDS. The proportion of the population with access to drinking water has increased from 80 per cent in 1998 to 95 per cent in 2007. During the period from 1996 to 2007, infant mortality dropped from 23.4 to 13.4 per 1,000 live births.

Venezuela has made major contributions to efforts for cooperation and complementarity between the countries of the South. The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), which was established by Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Dominica, Honduras and Venezuela, is an initiative that brings together the abilities and strengths of its members to bring about structural change and the relationships necessary to achieve development and continue to exist as sovereign and just nations.

Petrocaribe is an energy cooperation agreement proposed by the Government of Bolivia to resolve the asymmetries in the region between energy producers and consumers by means of a new, equitable and just system of trade between the countries of the Caribbean region.

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is an ongoing political endeavour, which, in its short existence, has shown that it is politically effective and respects the sovereignty of peoples. It has arrived at common positions on projects in the fields of energy, social affairs, finance, education, infrastructure, dispute resolution and defence, and has gone beyond mere talk to become part of daily life of the citizens of South America. The recent unanimous support of President Evo Morales and democracy in Bolivia is a good example of that.

The President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, stated that more than a half of the peoples of the Earth languish in hunger and poverty while ever-increasing amounts of money are wasted on arms, wars, luxury items and totally superfluous and unnecessary goods.

That addiction to war is the only thing that can explain the fact that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, war-loving countries and alliances continued to chip away, day after day, at Russian democracy and to intrigue in the region against Moscow instead of abandoning their threats of war and trying to resolve the lack of trust that is the source of conflict and violence. It is a disgraceful situation that has not wanted for ignorant cowboys who think they are heroes. The Russian bear is awakening from its hibernation.

How many human lives have we lost among Iraqis, Americans, Latin Americans, Europeans, Asians and Africans? And how many lives could we save if the resources devoted to war and to the recovery of financial institutions were devoted instead to social investment?

The reform process requires the adoption of measures to strengthen the authority of the General Assembly, including on matters of international peace and security, given that it is the principal deliberating, participatory and democratic body of the Organization. Venezuela supports the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Security Council, the abolishment of the antidemocratic post-war mechanism of the veto and the improvement of the Council's working methods, so that it may be more transparent and accessible and so that never again will anyone resort to lying to the Council.

We must remain vigilant to ensure that the Human Rights Council continues to operate on the basis of principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity without stigmatizing anyone and to promote constructive dialogue, without diversions about certification, cooperation without preconditions or vetoes, and respect for the particular circumstances of nations and regions, as well as for our diverse historical, cultural and religious pasts.

We reject racist, xenophobic and discriminatory measures that clearly deny the human rights that should apply universally to all, including migrants. Criminalizing migrants and their families violates their fundamental rights. Measures such as the Return

Directive approved by the European Parliament incite racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and intolerance. That is incompatible with the defence, promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We prefer a Europe of light, integration and reconciliation to a Europe of shadows.

We know that we are not at the end of history; we are not even at the beginning of the end of history. What we do know is that we are apparently at the close of a chapter of history, at the end of a neoliberal nightmare in which unbridled capitalism — as John Paul II described it — social violence and the persistent worldwide violation of all human rights prevailed.

This afternoon, the House of Representatives of the United States of America took an historic decision whose effects will be felt throughout the world in the times to come. Very soon next year, we hope to be able to say that the worst has past and that the perverse effects of the religion of the market will be replaced, God willing, on the global level, allowing us to move towards democracy, progress and social justice, ensuring peace among nations — among nations that are free and stand together, among nations that are united.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Rosemary Banks, chair of the delegation of New Zealand.

Ms. Banks (New Zealand): Sixty-three years after its formation, the United Nations remains the world's central international body. Only here do all countries come together to devise solutions and to forge collective action on global challenges. And these are particularly challenging times. As the Secretary-General and many others have noted, we are facing a global financial crisis, a global energy crisis and a global food crisis. More than ever before, we are an interconnected and interdependent world community. The Charter goals of peace and prosperity require the full support of all United Nations Members. New Zealand was a founding member in 1945, and our commitment to this body is as strong now as it was then.

At such a difficult time in the world we need leadership, courage and a recommitment of our resources to tackle the issues before us. When the food crisis was first in the headlines, the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force provided a mechanism for us all to respond. Having contributed nearly $NZ 10 million to date, New Zealand is among those assisting with urgent food security needs and medium-term policy responses. A successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round would alleviate much of the pressure on the demand-supply imbalance.

On the development theme of this sixty-third session, New Zealand fully associates with the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Global Call to Action Campaign. Support is urgently needed to revitalize collective efforts, including developing and strengthening partnerships between traditional and new donors, the private sector and civil society, and through South-South cooperation. We are set to play our part.

New Zealand is significantly stepping up official development assistance (ODA) from 0.27 per cent of gross national income in 2007 to 0.35 per cent by 2010-2011. That 62 per cent increase will take New Zealand aid to over $NZ 600 million.

We are acutely aware that the Pacific is the second region after sub-Saharan Africa that is least likely to meet the MDG targets. We are therefore looking to direct our increased ODA there, through a Pacific strategy, which focuses poverty reduction efforts around four key pillars: strengthening governance, achieving broader-based growth and sustainable livelihoods, improving health and education, and reducing vulnerabilities, including to climate change.

In these challenging times, we look to the United Nations to deliver effectively for development, for peace and security and on human rights. Our Organization must continue to evolve along with the changing demands on it. Momentum needs to be maintained in the modernization of the United Nations. We share the Secretary-General's vision for that and support his proposals to fix the human resources management system, which he has characterized as dysfunctional.

I would now like to turn to the challenges of peace and security around the world, from which our own region is not immune. At the Pacific Islands Forum held in Niue last month, New Zealand and other members of the Pacific Forum community expressed profound disappointment at Fiji's lack of progress towards restoring democratic government. The Forum communiqué urged the interim regime in Fiji to fulfil

its promise to hold elections in accordance with Fiji's existing constitution by March next year. Leaders also acknowledged that there were long-term issues to be resolved in Fiji and supported a Commonwealth-led independent and inclusive political dialogue process to address them. That will not only create a more conducive environment for elections, but also enable a newly elected Government to engage with key stakeholders to promote national reconciliation. New Zealand urges all United Nations Members to support the steps taken by the Pacific Islands Forum to encourage Fiji to return to democratic and constitutional government as soon as possible.

Mr. Nsengimana (Rwanda), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Our region is also home to Timor-Leste, a partner and friend of New Zealand. We are pleased to see encouraging progress since last year's elections, especially the building of institutions and improving governance. That was achieved despite assassination attempts on Timor-Leste's leadership. The United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the International Stabilization Force continue to play a valuable role in helping to maintain security. New Zealand strongly supports the UNMIT mandate and its extension beyond February 2009. Planning for security in the longer term, to ensure appropriately sized and resourced institutions with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, is also a key issue, and we stand ready to help.

Also within our region, the political, economic and human rights situation in Myanmar remains troubling. We urge the Myanmar authorities to achieve national reconciliation through open and constructive dialogue and to respect universal human rights in the country, consistent with international obligations. We support the efforts of the United Nations to sustain a dialogue with the Myanmar Government in order to build foundations for the future.

On the African continent, the humanitarian disaster caused by the conflict in Darfur is unacceptable. The targeting of civilians by State and non-State parties, is a flagrant breach of international human rights law. The widespread absence of justice and accountability for such human rights violations and the impunity that this promotes represent major obstacles to improving the human rights situation in Darfur.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the recent announcement of a power-sharing agreement offers hope that the long period of violent repression and human rights abuses by the previous Government can be brought to a close. The international community will be watching closely to see that all parties fulfil the commitments that they have made to bring about peace, respect for political freedom and human rights and a Government which reflects the will of the people.

Let me turn now to the Middle East. New Zealand continues to be strongly supportive of all attempts to find a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We share the international community's vision for a viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

In Afghanistan, despite political progress, the overall situation is fragile. The international community needs to devote more resources to ending the conflict and to assisting the people of Afghanistan in their efforts to stabilize and rebuild their country. New Zealand has expressed a strong commitment to restoring peace and security in Afghanistan with our assistance, both military and developmental, totalling more than 160 million New Zealand dollars to date.

Closer to home, New Zealand welcomes the recent improvement in cross-Strait relations. Cross-Strait stability is vital to the security of the greater Asia-Pacific region. We encourage China and Taiwan to maintain the dialogue which has been established.

New Zealand remains a strong supporter of efforts to protect and maintain the international rule of law. To that end, one of the most significant advances in recent times has been the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). When the ICC was first established, it was widely considered to herald the beginning of a new era in international criminal justice. The Court has now reached a crucial stage in its development, and it has become clear that the establishment of a global justice system brings with it many challenges. It is of the utmost importance that States rise to those challenges. To fail to do so would be a betrayal of the victims of egregious crimes. New Zealand urges States to make every effort to ensure the independence and success of the Court. The Court needs our full support and cooperation to ensure that individuals responsible for the most serious violations

of international law are brought to justice without delay.

In this sixtieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we acknowledge the many international human rights conventions that have arisen out of that unique statement of overriding principles. New Zealand played an active part in the design of the new Human Rights Council, and we are seeking election to the Council next year, so as to be more closely involved in its work.

The newest member of the family of human rights treaties is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which New Zealand ratified this month. We look forward to the first conference of States parties, and to the opportunity the Convention offers to make a real improvement in the lives and human rights of disabled people everywhere.

Finally, let me reiterate the importance that New Zealand attaches to the concept of the responsibility to protect. The United Nations, through the Security Council, should be prepared to protect people against ethnic cleansing, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity when national authorities fail to do so. There is a clear need to enhance early warning systems to enable the Council to act in a timely manner. We look forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect, and we stand ready to help to take that important initiative forward.

As we look forward to the year ahead, New Zealand pledges to work actively with others in our collective stewardship of the United Nations. We shall play our part in the continuing, patient process of renewing our Organization and of making it more resilient and responsive.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, chairman of the delegation of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Mr. Pramudwinai (Thailand): The attachment that Thailand has had to the ideals and principles that gave birth to the United Nations is long, enduring and natural. From the very first day in this family of nations more than 60 years ago, Thailand, or Siam at that time, made known to all that we stood for peace, for freedom and for tolerance, because peace, freedom and tolerance are part of our national character — a part of who we are. Today, our commitment to peace, freedom and tolerance anywhere and everywhere remains unwavering, and it will remain so.

Therefore, I warmly congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, a man of peace, freedom and tolerance, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. His cause is our cause, and he can rest assured that the Thai delegation will give him its full support and cooperation.

We are living in a world of enormous opportunities for progress. But we are also living in a world that is in a state of flux, a world that is drifting from one crisis to another. The information technology revolution and transportation advancements have brought people from all corners of the world closer together than ever before. We are now living in a global village, but, sadly, this village is not united as one. This village is deeply divided along political, economic, social, racial, religious and cultural lines. That is not sustainable; it is not healthy. It should not be allowed to go on. All of us have a stake in this. We must not take those divisions for granted or as a given, because they are not.

We need to reclaim the ideal that brought us together in this place: the ideal of "We the peoples". We need to cultivate and nurture a "we" feeling among us. We must try our best to focus on what binds us together rather than on what keeps us apart. We must be fully aware that to continue to see the world through the glasses of "us versus them" can only lead to confrontation. And confrontation helps no one, because, at the end of the day, in this interconnected globalized world, no one wins everything, but everyone can lose everything. As Mahatma Gandhi once admonished, "An eye for an eye, and soon the whole world is blind".

We have a choice between progress and self-destruction, between cooperation and confrontation, and between amity and animosity. The choice is for all of us to make, and the choice is clear. There is no better alternative to progress, cooperation and amity among nations and peoples.

The Thai people have made their choice. It is for democracy. The challenge now in Thailand, as in other countries around the world, is to find the right balance between the political culture and the desire for democratic ideals. Nurturing a democratic culture in any country takes time and requires an appreciation of the fact that it is an evolutionary process in which ups

and downs are to be expected. Thailand's democratic evolution is no exception.

What is unique about the present state of political evolution in Thailand is the consistent expression of our national character: we stand for peace, for freedom and for tolerance. Indeed, Thai political developments have made a lot of headlines lately. But we trust that good eyes and informed minds will not mistake recent events for the trajectory of a nation. Thai people are resilient people. The Thai society is a resilient society. And Thai people and Thai society are determined to move ahead along the democratic path.

The world has made a choice with respect to development. That choice is embodied in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We are now midway towards 2015, the target year for their realization. While there have been many remarkable and encouraging success stories of progress so far — in reducing poverty, hunger and disease, to name a few — there are also unremarkable and discouraging stories of setbacks. For far too many countries, the realization of the MDGs by 2015 has become increasingly difficult to achieve. Thailand therefore is pleased to see the international community coming together as one in its determination to work harder to help people in each and every country enjoy the fruits of developmental progress and well-being.

To help one another to have a better life is a moral imperative as well as a practical necessity. Can anyone afford to live happily and sleep soundly on an island of opulence in the middle of a sea of poverty and despair? Certainly, the answer is no. It is after all in the enlightened self-interest of every country to ensure that the MDG targets are met — as many and as soon as possible.

Our unity as "We the peoples" is all the more important in the face of the perfect storm that is the global oil crisis, food crisis and financial crisis. These multiple crises threaten to derail the achievements of the MDGs or even to undo hard-won gains of the past in many countries. Developing countries need stability and security in the world energy market. Every dollar hike resulting from speculation on oil price futures being traded on futures market floors means development costs for the Governments of developing countries and affects the livelihoods of ordinary people around the world.

But in every crisis, there exists an opportunity. The exponential rise in oil prices has made it necessary for countries to adapt their patterns of consumption and to rethink their energy security strategies. The global oil crisis has not spared Thailand: our people have been adversely affected by the skyrocketing oil prices in almost every aspect of their lives.

At the same time, Thailand has learned to adapt and adjust. Energy efficiency and the development of alternative energy sources, such as liquefied gas, biofuels and gasohol, are now being pursued with greater urgency. Because of the global oil crisis, more and more vehicles in Thailand today have been shifted to various sources of alternative energy. This market for alternative energy is booming in Thailand and across Asia. There is so much potential in this market, and Thailand stands ready to work together with our friends from around the world in all endeavours pertaining to research in and development of alternative energy.

Developing countries need stability and security in the world food market. In addressing these challenges, we should not forget that the current food crisis has had multiple causes, such as the global oil crisis, drought and flooding. To be effective, any attempt to address this world food crisis must be comprehensive and concerted. It must look at the short-term imperative of keeping the supply flowing in the world market while working towards the longer-term imperative of stabilizing food prices and enhancing productivity.

As a rice bowl of the world, Thailand will continue to ensure a constant supply to the world rice market. We will continue to work with other countries to enhance productivity and ensure food security. In the past, we had an industrial revolution and an information technology revolution. Now, we believe, is the time for the next revolution: a green revolution. We will continue to work with countries around the world to ensure an open international food market and establish agricultural trade rules that help the world's poor farmers and shore up food security in developing countries. To that end, the Doha Development Round should resume as soon as possible.

Developing countries also need stability and security in the world financial markets. The current turmoil in the world financial markets, if not effectively addressed soon, threatens to cause

widespread economic downturns than could push millions below the poverty line and severely affect the achievement of the MDGs. To have the world financial crisis piling on top of the world energy and food crises is the last thing that people in the developing countries want to see. That is particularly true for people in Thailand and across Asia. Our painful experience has taught us how phenomena such as those that started off as a financial crisis in 1997 can spiral into a multifaceted crisis that drove millions of people into abject poverty and despair, strained the social fabric of societies and created social tensions that developed into political ones.

We who lived through those dark days do not want to see a repeat of this type of crisis again. All countries therefore have a high stake in the current financial turmoil. We must work together, and quickly, to arrest the downward spiralling effects before it is too late.

Besides the perfect storm of this year's world energy, food and financial crises, South-East Asia has witnessed a massive storm in the form of Cyclone Nargis, which struck Myanmar in May. Nargis was the most devastating cyclone ever to hit Myanmar. Many lives were lost and many livelihoods were severely affected. But Nargis was not an isolated case. In the past few years, we have witnessed a changing climate pattern that has produced successive monster storms and severe weather in all corners of the world. Ice at the North and South Poles is melting at a frightening speed. Sea level is rising steadily and threatens to engulf low-lying areas around the world. Drought has increased, and many areas, once arable, have turned into desert.

We can no longer turn our eyes away from the gathering threats posed by climate change. These threats recognize no political boundaries. Large and small, powerful and weak, we are all bound together by our common vulnerability and a common destiny as residents of planet Earth. We therefore have a collective responsibility on this issue.

The choice is clear and has been made. When the world gathered to discuss climate change at the Bali Conference in December last year, the world chose collective responsibility over collective irresponsibility. Thailand will spare no effort to work actively with all parties to ensure that the journey that started under the Bali road map last year can be realized at the Copenhagen conference scheduled for next year. This is a critical time that requires critical action by all parties. Time is simply not on our side.

There is a saying that, in every storm, every cloud has a silver lining. That is true for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Thailand is a member. Faced with the challenge of the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, ASEAN had to make a choice between doing nothing and losing its credibility, or doing something and being seen as a force to be reckoned with. ASEAN chose the latter. Acting as a bridge between Myanmar and the international community, ASEAN has successfully forged a working tripartite partnership between ASEAN, Myanmar and the United Nations. That partnership has continued to work effectively to this day and could serve as a model for future humanitarian partnerships in other parts of the world. Through that process, ASEAN has once again proven its effectiveness and resilience.

ASEAN has also made another choice — an important and profound one. ASEAN is moving towards being a rules-based and people-centred organization, with the signing of the ASEAN Charter this past year. The upcoming fourteenth ASEAN Summit will take place in Bangkok under the theme "ASEAN Charter for ASEAN peoples" to mark a new era for ASEAN, with people at the heart of our cooperation. As Chairman of ASEAN, Thailand has launched a "three Rs" campaign. First, we want to realize the purposes and vision of the Charter. That includes the realization of an ASEAN human rights body, one of the new organs envisaged in our Charter. Secondly, we will revitalize the people-centred nature of our community in order to enhance their participation in building an ASEAN community. Thirdly, we will reinforce ASEAN cooperation to better contribute to the well-being of our peoples, especially in the areas of human development and security.

Thailand will carry forward the work of the previous ASEAN Chair, Singapore, to realize the dream of the ASEAN founding fathers of transforming South-East Asia from a community of good neighbours into one ASEAN community, where the feeling of "we the peoples of ASEAN" takes root. The world will benefit from having a more rules-based, effective, predictable and people-centred ASEAN as a partner. Through greater integration with the regional countries

in Asia, ASEAN can become a natural bridge that connects China and India, the two emerging global economic centres of the twenty-first century, with a combined market size of billions of people. We believe that it is not too much or too far-fetched to see a new, modern silk road passing through ASEAN.

Allow me to conclude the same way I started. We need to reclaim the ideals of "We the peoples of the United Nations" in order to work together, to resolve our common problems and to survive. It has never been more imperative for the Members of this Organization to put aside for a moment our narrow self-interest and come together to forge solutions that are in the interest of us all. The United Nations can only be what the collective membership wishes it to be. "We the peoples of the United Nations" have a choice to make.

Let what one astronaut gazing at planet Earth from a space station once said serve to remind us all of our collective responsibility:

> "For those who have seen the Earth from space, and for the hundreds and perhaps thousands more who will, the experience most certainly changes your perspective. The things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us."

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Andrei Dapkiunas, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Belarusian; interpretation into Russian provided by the delegation*): This session's general political debate and high-level meetings once again convince us of the need to move in international relations from confrontation based on narrow national interests towards equal, mutually respectful dialogue and cooperation. Otherwise, it will not be possible to achieve progress in addressing the urgent global and regional problems facing humanity.

The advent of the twenty-first century raised many hopes, but thus far the world has not been able to avoid wars as a means of achieving its objectives. Imposing or dictating one's will and pressure by individual States increase conflict and make it difficult to overcome obstacles. Today, we are dealing with global challenges that not only impede humankind's development but also threaten our civilized existence. This situation imposes special responsibilities on all stakeholders in international relations, irrespective of their geographical location, their geopolitical influence or their socio-political systems. Equality, non-confrontation, mutual respect and proper dialogue: those are the keys to overcoming the obstacles to effective progress on development.

Over recent years, we have often spoken of the need to increase the effectiveness of the work of the General Assembly and its influence on overall global processes. That can be achieved only if each State that seeks to make its own modest but positive contribution to addressing global problems can be sure that its approaches and proposals will be closely and impartially studied in the General Assembly.

In the eight years since the Millennium Summit, we have seen that the Millennium Development Goals, on which the fate of millions of individuals depends, will continue to be mere words on paper if the more developed States do not cease to view efforts to establish the conditions conducive to development in countries in the South and to provide those countries with financial and economic support from the perspective of their own geopolitical interests. Let us just admit honestly that the global partnership for development that is mentioned so often in this Assembly still does not exist in practice.

Unless we deal with the energy and food crises, we will not achieve any progress. We must work in the interests of all and not serve the wishes of a narrow group of influential countries. We also need to clearly determine how we will target our efforts and act in a systematic way.

The challenges we are facing are interrelated: climate change and energy and food shortages, to a large extent, are due to existing patterns of energy use. Humankind has an increasing impact on the atmosphere and the biosphere; environmental problems due to the increasing impact of human activity lead to climate change; climate change, in turn, leads to reduced agricultural harvests; and that, in turn, exacerbates the food crisis.

Thus, we are faced with a single, multidimensional global challenge, and the value of this session will be magnified if at this international forum we hear new, justified and forward-thinking proposals for a coordinated response to the challenges facing humankind. Such an approach should undergird the work on a post-Kyoto agreement, and today it is

clear that talks on that accord must include a broader range of issues than simply agreement on quantities and quotas for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Belarus has stated on many occasions that future approaches to the problem of how to ensure economic growth while not harming the environment will be based on international cooperation to spread throughout the world energy-saving technology and technology for the use of alternative and renewable sources of energy.

An intrinsic, fundamental and vital element of that cooperation should be ensuring fair access by all States to such technology by establishing, through the United Nations, a global mechanism to control the process. The first step in that direction has been defined and can be adopted in the very near future: their Tehran ministerial meeting, on the initiative of Belarus the non-aligned States proposed holding at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly a thematic debate on ensuring access for all States to energy-efficient technology and the use of alternative and renewable sources of energy — naturally with due respect for intellectual property rights.

Particular attention must be paid to establishing a multidimensional energy agenda at the United Nations, which should take into account the interests of producer, transit and user countries. Responsible energy cooperation can be a key factor in regional security. Turkmenistan's proposal to discuss ways to ensure reliable transit for fuel is also promising.

In the context of establishing a fair system of international economic relations, particular attention must be paid to a code of conduct for transnational corporations in exploiting oil and gas fields and the mineral resources of developing countries. We need reliable protection against the practice of international oil cartels of finding concessions that are profitable to them, but that amount to slavery for the host country. Such deals are often challenged, but the oil companies use the media to justify their measures, citing threats to regional security. We look forward to the discussion of that important initiative and those issues during this session of the General Assembly.

Indeed, attempts to get access to resources are the basic cause of many current conflicts. Here, we are talking not only about oil and other energy resources: people are also dying because of local conflicts linked to the lack of drinking water. Given the fact that 97 per cent of global water resources are found in the oceans and seas, finding practical ways to desalinate seawater should be a priority for scientific research in the coming decades.

The United Nations can play a role in defining the future of such technology, and we believe that this should belong to all mankind. To ensure that, we must put in place mechanisms to avoid the concentration of such technologies in the hands of a chosen few. One of the main keys to successfully addressing global problems facing mankind is speedily achieving agreements and understandings among the whole international community. Any delay in addressing climate change is unacceptable, because it affects other issues on the international agenda.

We believe that one of the main concerns on that agenda should be human development and the prevention of exploitation of nations and individuals. A United Nations action plan to fight human trafficking is an important stage in efforts to counter contemporary forms of slavery. Within the United Nations, work on that plan is under way: we have set up an inter-agency coordination group; resolutions have been adopted by the General Assembly and by the Economic and Social Council; and we have held thematic debates in the General Assembly. We call on all delegations to take an active and constructive role in that process, which will raise the issue of human trafficking to a new level. An inadequate response to the threat will promote the exploitation of entire nations and establish a new chain of human trafficking, and the number of new slaves will increase. Criminals will begin to select the best from among their victims, and, as a result, there will be growth in colonialist thinking in the new framework of globalization, which would render the problem particularly dangerous. We do not have the right to allow such a situation to develop.

From its very beginning, the United Nations was seen by its founding States as the most democratic of international institutions, a universal mechanism for involving all countries and peoples in establishing a new and just world order. As a founding Member of the United Nations, Belarus supports the initiative of the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann, to give particular attention to the democratization of the Organization. We support that process within the United Nations, and we support allowing all Member States equal

opportunities and the same rules of the game. We favour strict respect for all the principles set out in the United Nations Charter.

The results-oriented proposal for democratization includes enlarging the membership of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. Over the 20 years since the accident at Chernobyl, Belarus has acquired unique experience in studying the effects of radiation on individuals and the environment, and we would like to have the opportunity to share that experience with other States within the framework of the Scientific Committee. We call on all States to support the admission of Belarus as a member of the Committee, which was established on the recommendation of the First Committee, adopted as resolution 913 (X), entitled "Effects of atomic radiation".

We also support efforts to democratize the Secretariat. The management of each Secretariat department should respect the principle of equitable geographic representation. The top five jobs in each department should be distributed among the five regional groups. Establishing that principle will be an important step forward in creating confidence among Member States.

We hope that we are moving towards several important international events. In Doha, there will be an international conference on financing for development. Work is continuing on a post-Kyoto accord, and discussions on the reform of the Security Council are entering a new phase. Their success depends on us all. Will we be able to have a constructive dialogue and a non-confrontational approach and reach a deeper understanding of the real interests of all peoples throughout the world than we have today? Most answers to those key issues of the contemporary world are to be found in our own history. All we need to do is look back at our own history and draw the right lessons from the past in a timely way.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Maurer, chairman of the delegation of the Swiss Confederation.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr. Pascal Couchepin, who had to cancel his trip to New York at the very last minute.

Since its foundation, the United Nations has embodied the hope of all people to live in peace, freedom and dignity. As Members of the United Nations and as representatives of our peoples, we are under an obligation not to disappoint those hopes. Three years ago in this Hall, we decided in the 2005 World Summit Outcome to ensure that human beings would live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. We ought now to ask ourselves the following questions: Have we kept that promise? Have the expectations been fulfilled? Have we done enough to bring about peace and security, development and the realization of human rights?

According to a recent World Bank report, the number of people living in poverty has fallen by 500 million since 1981. Their proportion of the total population has fallen from 52 to 26 per cent. Nevertheless, 1.2 billion people still have to get by on less than a dollar a day. Twenty-five thousand people a day are dying as a result of starvation and poverty. There are still 67 million refugees and internally displaced persons on the planet. No State, however wealthy or powerful, can tackle all these challenges alone. Common solutions are required. A strong United Nations is needed, a United Nations that focuses on that which unites rather than on that which divides.

Cooperation across cultural and religious borders is not always easy. Swiss history has shown that this type of cooperation is most likely to bear fruit when specific problems are tackled and solutions are sought through open dialogue. This approach is reflected in Swiss peace policy. We support projects the purpose of which is to bring together people with different values and cultural backgrounds to enable them to coexist in a positive way. This approach also characterizes our activity in the United Nations-sponsored Alliance of Civilizations.

Although dialogue is necessary, it is nevertheless only one of the means of promoting the fundamental values to which we are all devoted. I am thinking first and foremost of human rights, access to a decent standard of living and personal development for everyone.

In this context, Switzerland is participating actively in the work of the Human Rights Council. Let us recall that the usefulness of the Council will ultimately be judged by the specific contribution that it makes to the protection of human rights on the ground.

The Universal Periodic Review and its special procedures provide the Council with two effective tools, and those tools must be used. Switzerland will continue to advocate in favour of a constructive and critical Universal Periodic Review, the independence of special procedures and the autonomy of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Next year, the Review Conference on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action will take place at Durban. For Switzerland, the fight against racism is a priority. That is why my country will play its part in this process. However, we expect the preparatory phase to be characterized by a constructive spirit that helps us achieve a balanced outcome. In particular, the Review Conference should confine itself to the evaluation of the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. It should not call into question the normative advances set out in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. And finally, it should deal with different subjects relating to racism in a balanced manner, without becoming a platform that focuses on a particular situation.

Last week, the Assembly also discussed the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. We all know that the implementation of the Goals is slow and arduous. Collectively, we could have done more. We should have done more, and Switzerland is no exception. But we are trying to assign our limited resources to actions that meet the needs of recipients, that make a difference to the poorest, that help people to help themselves and that complement, but do not replace, the efforts of recipient countries.

Development assistance should be characterized by lasting effectiveness and coherence. The Follow-Up International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Doha, will give us an opportunity to renew and to deepen this alliance between developing and industrialized countries.

Progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals requires that the world's poorest be better protected legally. Only if they can defend themselves against injustice and have equal access to justice, property, work and markets will development ultimately be possible. The Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor presented its report a few months ago. It deserves careful study and follow-up by the Assembly.

The food crisis has undoubtedly made achieving the Millennium Development Goals more difficult. Like some other countries, Switzerland has responded to the crisis by increasing its contribution to the World Food Programme. But the causes of food price rises also need to be addressed. The causes are diverse and range from changing eating habits to increased cultivation of agrofuel crops and neglect of agricultural production. Measures to resolve this crisis will have to be both numerous and varied. In this regard, we welcome the efforts made by the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in providing a coherent and efficient response.

However, there is also a positive side to this crisis. Rising food prices may also represent an opportunity for farmers in developing countries. But for farmers to benefit from the rise in food prices they need access to land and property, financing and seed. Likewise, they need international rules against the flooding of their sales markets by subsidized agricultural products, as well as better access to the markets of industrialized countries.

A positive conclusion of the World Trade Organization (WTO) discussions could have been a positive sign of movement in this direction. Switzerland therefore regrets that it was not possible to reach agreement at the Ministerial Meeting held in Geneva in July. The challenge now is to ensure that the progress already made is not jeopardized and that confidence among WTO member States is restored, so that the Doha Round can be brought to a successful conclusion.

Climate change is another major source of concern. We in Switzerland are particularly aware of this fact because our alpine glaciers are rapidly melting away. In other parts of the world, this phenomenon takes the form of changing precipitation patterns, droughts and floods. The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) clearly show that all these disasters have a point in common: they are the result of climate change and are caused by human beings, and particularly by the consumption of fossil fuels.

The time for never-ending talks has passed. Switzerland will achieve its emissions reduction goals for 2012. For the years after 2012, we need a new,

ambitious and internationally accepted climate regime. Such a regime should be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Switzerland has put forward a proposal for a global carbon dioxide tax which meets that criterion and would ensure the financing of the necessary adaptation measures. I would like to invite the Assembly to carefully study this proposal in the framework of the ongoing climate discussions.

The efforts of the industrialized countries alone will not be enough, however, to solve the problem of global warming. Each country will, according to its own capacities, have to contribute to the reduction of CO_2 emissions. In so doing, we are united by a common concern: that of shouldering our responsibility to future generations.

Today, many countries are still in situations of armed conflict. In many cases, respect for international humanitarian law has declined. That is why Switzerland calls again on all conflicting parties to comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law and to guarantee humanitarian organizations swift and unhindered access to the victims of conflicts.

Conflict prevention is one of the central tasks of the United Nations. Switzerland is particularly active on two levels. First, we wish to pay closer attention to the connection between armed violence and development. Together with other partners, we intend to submit a draft resolution on this subject during this session of the General Assembly. Secondly, we strongly advocate the strengthening of the Secretariat's mediation capacities. The mediation efforts in Kenya, for instance, have demonstrated that this form of conflict prevention can work.

That brings me to the subjects of the responsibility to protect and of prevention of genocide. Switzerland welcomes the fact that these subjects have been institutionally anchored more firmly within the United Nations.

The concept of the responsibility to protect was recognized in September 2005 in the framework of the World Summit. It is obvious that the operational implementation of the concept can only be realized progressively. Nevertheless, Switzerland will commit to ensuring that the concept is not partially assimilated into that of humanitarian intervention, thereby calling into question the consensus achieved in 2005.

Justice is necessary for building lasting peace. In other words, peace and impunity are incompatible in the long term. The arrest and extradition of Charles Taylor and Radovan Karadzic to The Hague have once again confirmed the importance of international criminal justice. Alleged war criminals must not be allowed to live in serenity. They must answer for their acts in a fair trial. That is the preventive effect of the international criminal justice system, and it should not be underestimated. Switzerland therefore supports the work of the International Criminal Court and advocates its independence.

At the beginning of my speech, I stressed the great importance of the United Nations. The world is changing, however, and international relations are constantly developing. The United Nations will also have to change. Those who focus only on the past will no doubt miss the future.

There is a need for reform in all United Nations bodies, but particularly in the Security Council. Given the power that it exerts, the expectations of the Security Council are very high. If its decisions are to be accepted and supported by the entire international community, the Council will need to adapt to the realities of the twenty-first century, namely, the new balances that characterize our world at the political, economic and demographic levels.

Moreover, it is important that the views of important actors that are not members of the Council should be better taken into account in decision-making. Switzerland has for some time advocated an improvement of the Council's working methods and will continue to work for greater participation and transparency.

Peace is not a given. It is an ideal that has to be pursued every day. The United Nations is the predestined venue for achieving that goal. We are willing, within our capacities, to make our contribution to that pressing collective task.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Somduth Soborun, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius): I stand in for The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, who is not able to be personally present to address this Assembly at this session. The Prime Minister has asked me, on his

behalf to make this statement and to convey his kind greetings to President D'Escoto Brockmann; to his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim; and our Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The problems we face are many and daunting, but we believe that humankind has the ingenuity and resources to overcome adversity through a unified response. The goal of promoting human development and security, in all its manifold aspects, should remain our priority. In that regard, the theme of this session — "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger and the need to democratize the United Nations" — is both timely and relevant.

We are all affected by the growing global food crisis. As always, the brunt of food insecurity is borne by Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, where riots and strikes have occurred and social unrest threatens political stability. Admittedly, a number of factors underlie the present scarcity of food. Some of those factors are beyond our control. However, there is an urgent need for us to address such issues as outdated agricultural practices, inadequate infrastructure, the inequitable distribution of land ownership and insecurity of tenure. The list is long. The remedies are known. Hopefully, we can bring to bear the political will that is required.

Mauritius is a net food importing country. To reduce our dependence on food imports, the Government is implementing a plan to maximize food production. We are optimizing land use and diversifying the production of food crops, livestock and seafood. To overcome the constraints of land availability and take advantage of economies of scale, we aim, in partnership with neighbouring countries, to produce for our common domestic markets and eventually for exports to the region. Our experiments in that respect with Madagascar and Mozambique are proving to be mutually beneficial and hold great promise for the future.

The right to food is one that is very often overlooked, and yet it is intimately connected to human dignity. It is important that the international community act now to ensure that this fundamental human right is respected. In this era of scientific and technological prowess, when we are unravelling the mysteries of the immensities of the universe and subatomic particles, and when the discoveries of science daily amaze us and change our perceptions of reality, it is unconscionable that countless children should sleep on an empty stomach. One out of every six persons in the world suffers from hunger. That is the greatest moral challenge facing humanity today.

We commend the Secretary-General for the timely establishment of the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. We also welcome the recent proposal by the European Commission to create a special facility amounting to more than $1.5 billion for a rapid response to food crises, in coordination with the United Nations Task Force and international organizations.

Over a period of almost one year, the unprecedented level of the price of oil has dealt a severe blow to the economic growth of many developing countries. Mauritius depends on imported oil for 80 per cent of its energy consumption, which makes it extremely vulnerable on that count. The share of petroleum products in our import bill went up from 12 per cent in 2000 to 18 per cent in 2007. We have recently set up the "Maurice Ile Durable" project to encourage more efficient use of energy and to tap renewable energy sources.

(*spoke in French*)

The Maurice Ile Durable project is bold, but we believe that the current global situation calls for boldness. The prime objective of the project is to strike a balance between our economic, environmental and social needs. Last year, we achieved a 5.4 per cent growth rate increase and this year we forecast a rate of more than 5.7 per cent. However, we realize that growth is not an end in itself.

The Government is pursuing a model of development that takes into account not only economic imperatives, but also the deep-seated aspirations of each Mauritian citizen. At the same time, we cannot allow ourselves to compromise the opportunities for future generations.

The Maurice Ile Durable project seeks to make Mauritius a fully-fledged laboratory. We will use the natural resources with which our island is so liberally endowed — the sea, the sun, the wind and a rich plant biomass. We seek an environmental solution to the problem of global warming and to our dependence on the extremely volatile hydrocarbons market. We have set ourselves the target of reducing our dependence of petroleum-based products by two thirds within

20 years. This is how we are contributing to international efforts to combat the greenhouse effect. It is the wager for the future of a very vulnerable small island economy, but I want to believe that it is also the objective of a planet threatened with suffocation on the long term.

(*spoke in English*)

While the causes of food insecurity and the energy crisis are multiple and complex, there is little doubt that climate change will exacerbate the situation in the future. Climate change places a particular burden on developing countries, which have done the least to cause the problem. Developing countries are in dire need of assistance to enhance their adaptive capacity and minimize their vulnerability because, on their own, they cannot bear the burden of the costs of mitigation and adaptation.

As an island, Mauritius is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea-level rise, beach erosion, coral bleaching and extreme weather conditions. They not only affect our local resources and industries such as fisheries and tourism, but also threaten vital infrastructure, settlements and services. The increased frequency and scale of natural disasters exacerbate our inherent vulnerability.

Mauritius is fully engaged in the post-Bali process. The meetings to be held in Poznan in December and in Copenhagen next year will be crucial to determining emission targets. It is vital that we reach a comprehensive agreement on a climate change framework. At the last high-level meeting on climate change, Mauritius made a plea for the creation of a special fund to enable the development and implementation of adaptation measures. Our appeal to international donors to provide the much-needed resources for operating the fund is yet to be answered. However, we welcome the recent declaration by the leaders of the Group of Eight of a long-term emissions reduction target of at least 50 per cent by 2050. We also welcome their undertaking to help support the mitigation plans of major developing countries through technology transfer and capacity-building.

Small island developing States are innocent victims of global warming and the degradation of the environment. Only a few weeks ago, we witnessed the devastation caused by a quick succession of hurricanes in the Caribbean. We therefore call on the international community to assist small island developing States to incorporate adaptation and mitigation plans into their national strategies. Continued access to official development assistance, concessionary financing arrangements, the reduction of debt servicing and improved terms of trade are crucial to building up the economic resilience of small island developing States.

We are particularly concerned about the inadequate level of implementation of the Barbados Plan of Action and the Mauritius Strategy. We reiterate our request to the international community to honour the offers of assistance made during the international conference on small island developing States held in Mauritius in 2005. Furthermore, the arbitrary gross domestic product criteria applied to determine the eligibility for securing concessionary finance disqualify most small island developing States from accessing much-needed funds for important infrastructure development. It is absolutely necessary in that regard that small island developing States be treated as a distinct category.

More than halfway through, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) track record is mixed. Some developing countries are on target while others, particularly from the African continent, are facing crippling difficulties. Even the gains painstakingly achieved in fighting hunger and poverty are tenuous and could be nullified by the current food and energy crisis. It is vital that donors and development partners honour the pledges made in the Millennium Declaration, the 2002 Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development and the 2005 World Summit.

Mauritius is on track to meet the MDG targets. Efforts are under way in all key socio-economic sectors to further improve living standards and to achieve the MDGs as early as possible. We are addressing poverty in a comprehensive and coherent manner, convinced that it will have a positive impact on the other development goals. Our experience has demonstrated that the most effective remedy to poverty is inclusive economic growth.

The Government is pursuing a number of programmes announced in its latest budget to eliminate absolute poverty. We have introduced an Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme, which comprises a number of integrated development projects within identified pockets of poverty. We have also put in place a Human Resource Development, Knowledge and Arts

Fund to ensure that university studies become affordable to all. We aim to double enrolment in tertiary education by 2015.

In April, Mauritius hosted the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) International Conference on Poverty and Development. I am happy to inform the Assembly that the Conference formulated a regional strategy for poverty eradication in the SADC countries. The SADC secretariat has taken follow-up action on the development of an implementation plan. In line with one of the Conference recommendations, a joint ministerial task force on food security, comprising the ministers of finance, trade and agriculture, met in Lusaka on 13 July 2008 to tackle the food crisis affecting the region.

Africa's development needs were debated at the highest level on Monday, 22 September. Concrete and concerted action on the part of African States and their cooperation partners is called for to help achieve sustained and sustainable development on the continent. Furthermore, we look forward to the forthcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development in Doha. It will be a unique opportunity to address the various facets of concessionary financing and to find new resources for development.

More important, the Doha Development Agenda should deliver on its promise of development through increased trading opportunities as a means of eradicating poverty. With regard to the World Trade Organization negotiations, we join those who have called for the talks to progress on the basis of what has already been achieved. We remain fully committed to the Doha Development Agenda and will contribute constructively to the negotiations.

We support the effective and quick implementation of the Aid for Trade Initiative, which should take into account the priorities and needs of beneficiary countries. At present, our limited industrial capacity prevents us from taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by globalization. On the regional front, I am pleased to say that we have made major strides in our integration process. The SADC Free Trade Area was launched on 17 August 2008, and we are aiming to fully liberalize trade by 2012.

Since the adoption of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (resolution S-26/2), increasing numbers of people have gained access to HIV prevention and treatment in low- and middle-income countries. However, many countries still have a long way to go to meet the goal we set ourselves under MDG 6 of achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa continues to be a cause for alarm.

Engagement at the highest level is vital in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The Mauritius National AIDS Committee, under the chairmanship of The Honourable Prime Minister, oversees the implementation of a multisectoral HIV and AIDS strategic plan. That plan provides for antiretroviral treatment free of charge to all HIV-infected persons, voluntary counselling and testing service and the implementation of a mother-to-child transmission prevention programme. The Government has also increased the amount allocated to the fight against HIV/AIDS by 50 per cent in the current budget.

As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, we must remain unwavering in our resolve to promote and protect human rights. Much remains to be done to ensure that the basic rights of individuals are universally protected. The Mauritian Constitution guarantees that our citizens enjoy fundamental rights in their everyday lives. The National Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Centre, the Parliamentary Commission for the Democratization of the Economy and the proposed Equal Opportunities Act are important mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights in our country.

As an advocate of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, Mauritius severely condemns the decision of Myanmar's military junta to prolong the house arrest of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi. My delegation believes that the national reconciliation and full democratization of Myanmar cannot be achieved without the release of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi and other political detainees and without the participation of the National League for Democracy in the political process.

Situations of conflict and war inevitably give rise to violations of human rights and to atrocities against innocent civilians. Displacement and violent death continue to be the lot of far too many in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Mauritius has always

supported the struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to self-determination. We favour the creation of a Palestinian State coexisting with the State of Israel within secure and recognized borders. It is through dialogue, negotiations and compromise by both sides that lasting peace can come about in the Middle East.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur remains a matter of grave concern for my delegation. We urge all parties involved in the conflict, especially the authorities, to exercise restraint in their actions and to move towards a just and lasting solution to the conflict. We welcome the power-sharing accord reached in Zimbabwe. We hope that a Government of national unity will bring peace, stability and reconciliation to the Zimbabwean people, who have suffered for far too long the brutal consequences of the political crisis and economic meltdown.

The grave and pervasive threat of terrorism knows no boundaries; no country is shielded from its pernicious and devastating impact. Mauritius is committed to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It is imperative that we conclude a comprehensive convention against terrorism as soon as possible to reinforce the existing legal framework. In June 2008, as part of its contribution to the international efforts to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, Mauritius joined the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

We fully share the view of the President of the General Assembly regarding the democratization of our Organization. The ongoing discussions on the revitalization of the General Assembly, system-wide coherence, mandate review and management reform in the context of the United Nations reform process should be aimed at strengthening multilateralism. We need comprehensive reform of the Security Council so that it is able to meet the needs and respond to the aspirations of the increasingly changing political realities of the world.

We call for expansion of the Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent membership categories and for improvement in its working methods. Mauritius remains firmly committed to the Ezulwini Consensus, which calls for two seats in the permanent category and five non-permanent seats for Africa. I should like to reaffirm once again the unequivocal support of Mauritius for India to be a permanent member of a reformed Security Council. We also reaffirm our support for a Latin American and Caribbean country to be a permanent member of a reformed Council. Furthermore, we welcome the recent unanimous decision of the General Assembly to start intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform in an informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly by the end of February 2009.

The principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations should continue to guide us in our actions. I would like to bring up once again before the Assembly our legitimate sovereignty claim regarding the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia. The Archipelago was excised from the territory of Mauritius by the United Kingdom prior to our independence, in disregard of General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) of 1960 and 2066 (XX) of 1965. We have always favoured a settlement of the issue through constructive bilateral dialogue. In that regard, I wish to inform the Assembly that high-level talks are under way.

The Government is very sensitive to the aspirations of citizens of Mauritius to return to the islands of their birth in the Chagos Archipelago. I wish to recall here that they were forcibly removed from the Archipelago prior to its excision from Mauritius. Likewise, we urge France to pursue dialogue with Mauritius on the issue of Tromelin. It is our firm conviction that such bilateral dialogue will further consolidate our historical and friendly relations with both the United Kingdom and France.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the United Nations remains the most important and credible international multilateral Organization for the maintenance of peace and security and for building a better and safer world. The President of the General Assembly can rest assured of our unwavering support in the work of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Khaleel, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Maldives.

Mr. Khaleel (Maldives): I am delivering this statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Maldives, who, unfortunately, had to cancel his trip to New York at the last minute owing to various pressing engagements at home.

Permit me to begin by expressing my delegation's warmest congratulations to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I assure him of the full support and cooperation of my delegation in his work. I should also like to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the Assembly at its sixty-second session. In addition, I should like to offer my delegation's heartfelt gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his inspiring leadership and dedication in promoting the noble principles and ideals of this Organization.

Four years ago, the people of the Maldives embarked on a comprehensive reform programme aimed at strengthening and modernizing democratic governance in the country. Within that short period of time, unprecedented reforms have been adopted and the political landscape of the country has been completely transformed.

A new Constitution that fully guarantees the civil liberties and fundamental freedoms of our people was adopted on 7 August 2008. To safeguard the foundations of democracy on our islands, several oversight bodies — a National Human Rights Commission that complies with the Paris Principles, a Judicial Service Commission and an independent Elections Commission — have been established and are now operational. Significant progress is also being made in reforming and restructuring the legal and judicial system of the country to align it with internationally accepted norms and standards.

In accordance with the new Constitution, the Maldives will hold its first multiparty presidential election early next week. Parliamentary elections will be held before the end of February and local municipal elections will be completed by July next year.

Those gains were made with the help of the international community, particularly the Commonwealth, the European Union and the United Nations. I thank them for their invaluable support, encouragement and assistance in implementing the reform programme. My Government is also extremely grateful to those organizations for accepting our request for election monitoring and assistance in the electoral process. We are firm in our resolve that the elections shall be held in a free and fair manner in full conformity with internationally recognized standards and best practice.

When the Maldives joined the United Nations in 1965, we were one of the smallest and poorest States Members of this Organization. We lacked even the most basic political, legal and economic infrastructure and institutions necessary for self-governance. Our ability to provide for the welfare of our people was extremely limited. The economy was based largely on subsistence fishery, and the health and education sectors were severely underdeveloped. However, since then, the Maldives has achieved remarkable levels of socio-economic progress. Thirty years of strong and unwavering political leadership, complemented by the hard work of our people and the generous assistance of our development partners, have enabled the country successfully to pursue a people-centred path of sustainable development, based on social equity and justice.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are now fully incorporated into our national development priorities, and I am happy to note that we are among those countries that are on track to achieve most of the MDGs by 2015. We believe that the ongoing political, legal and human rights reform agenda will further strengthen our progress and propel us to new heights of socio-economic development, with the support of our partners.

As a result of our rapid development progress, four years ago the Assembly decided to graduate the Maldives from the list of least developed countries. The Maldives is also being hailed by the international community as a major success story of the multilateral development assistance framework.

And yet those hard-won achievements will be rendered meaningless if MDG 7 — environmental sustainability — cannot be guaranteed. It is now accepted beyond any doubt that climate change poses the most immediate and far-reaching threat to human security, directly compromising the most fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to life itself, for millions of people around the world.

From the highest Himalayan peaks to the low-lying coastal areas and small islands a metre or so above sea level, global warming and changing weather patterns are undermining the lives and livelihoods of millions of people around the planet, with the poor

being especially vulnerable. The recent hurricanes that left such a trail of destruction across the Caribbean once again brought into sharp relief the acute vulnerabilities of small island States, such as the Maldives, to global warming and climate change.

For the Maldives, climate change is not a distant possibility. It is happening now and is a reality that we are experiencing on a daily basis. The continuing degradation of the global environment is not only undermining our development process, but also seriously threatening the very survival of our people and the existence of our tiny country.

We are all aware of the grim predictions in the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. If those predictions were to come true, the Maldives and many other small island developing States and low-lying coastal areas would cease to exist within a relatively short period of time.

Hence, the Maldives and many other small island developing States do not have the luxury of hesitation and inaction, nor can we afford to pick and choose where and when that important issue needs to be addressed. For us, it is not solely a development issue, but also a moral, ethical, political, legal and human rights issue, as well as a grave security issue.

That is why the President of the Maldives took the initiative in 1987 to raise that issue before the Assembly. That is also why the Maldives participated in the Security Council debate on the issue last year, and why the Maldives decided to raise the issue before the Human Rights Council in 2008.

The inverse relationship between responsibility for climate change and vulnerability to its consequences is often overlooked. The Maldives and other small island developing States contribute the least to global warming, and yet their development and, indeed, their very existence are fundamentally threatened by global warming and its consequences.

Addressing the injustices of climate change is therefore the moral and ethical responsibility of the entire international community. It is time that we put people back in the climate change debate. We believe that a comprehensive rights-based approach to sustainable and just development, anchored in the concept of common but differentiated responsibility, is now an imperative.

In that regard, we are happy that, at the initiative of the Maldives and 80 other like-minded countries, the United Nations Human Rights Council for the first time, earlier this year, recognized the link between human rights and climate change. The Council will formally debate the issue at its tenth session in March 2009, and we hope that due consideration will be given to the outcome of the debate by our colleagues in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as they work to ensure an effective and equitable successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

The Maldives is encouraged by the renewed international impetus towards a more sustained and robust approach to achieving the MDGs. Indeed, the high-level event on the MDGs held last week clearly illustrates the collective commitment and interest of the international community to work towards achieving those Goals. The interrelationship between climate change, food security and the attainment of the MDGs cannot be overemphasized. It is now believed that the global food and energy crisis will drive more than 100 million more people into poverty.

While short-term measures may ease the immediate pressures, we believe that a sustainable solution to the problem lies in a fair and equitable trading regime and a shared vision of partnership and cooperation. The early and successful completion of the Doha Development Round and the successful outcome of the post-Bali negotiations, as well as the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Qatar at the end of this year will prove critical in that regard.

As a country that depends on importing most of its food and all of its energy resources, the Maldives is extremely concerned about the rise in global food and energy prices. Although the situation in the Maldives at present is relatively stable, the potential of a severe blow to our economy is alarmingly high. The Government is fully aware of the risks involved and is taking all necessary precautionary measures to ensure that the crisis does not adversely affect the daily lives and well-being of our people.

Organized crime and terrorism are continuing to threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. The recent bombings in India and Pakistan are yet another tragic reminder of the evil and insidious nature of terrorism. It is therefore important for the international community to ensure that the war against

terrorism remains a main priority on the international agenda.

The continued scourge of terrorism is particularly alarming when seen in the context of the spread of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction. The threat of a terrorist organization gaining access to such weapons is extremely alarming.

I am happy to note that the Maldives is now party to almost all the international conventions on counter-terrorism. Despite its limited resource and expertise, the Maldives has been actively working towards implementing its various regional and multilateral obligations under the international counter-terrorism regime. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to combating global terrorism and to Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1540 (2004) in particular.

A permanent and lasting resolution to the question of Palestine remains elusive. The Maldives reiterates its support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign homeland. We believe that the two-State solution remains the only viable option and needs to be pursued with greater vigour and vitality.

The United Nations in the twenty-first century must have the ability to take on emerging challenges in an expeditious and efficient manner. While we applaud the present efforts to reform and revitalize the Organization, we believe that such reforms cannot be successfully achieved without the much-anticipated reform of the Security Council. In that regard, we are happy that the Assembly has decided to proceed to intergovernmental negotiations in early 2009. We look forward to participating in those negotiations.

Despite the criticisms levelled against the United Nations, my country remains convinced that the Organization is the most potent and credible universal institution today. For the past six decades, the United Nations has been a beacon of hope for peoples around the world. Its universal character and the multilateralism that it embodies hold true to the ideals and virtues upon which it was founded and, without a doubt, provide the only viable framework for solving the world's great challenges, including climate change, sustainable development, human rights and global terrorism.

I therefore reaffirm the Maldives' commitment to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. I offer our full support to the United Nations in its resolute efforts to maintain international peace and security and to work towards the betterment of all humanity.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abderrahim Ould Hadrami, Chairman of the delegation of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is with pleasure that I offer Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann my warmest congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We have every confidence in his exceptional skill and future success in consolidating the gains achieved and in enhancing international peace and security in a world system characterized by prosperity, stability and progress. I would also like to pay tribute to the valuable efforts made by his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, to strengthen the principles of dialogue and consultation as a means to reach effective solutions to international issues and disputes. I would further like to express our thanks and gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his continual efforts on important issues relevant to reforming the Organization and to enhancing international peace and security.

The current session of the Assembly is convening at a time when our country, Mauritania, has undergone a change of head of State. I would like to seize this opportunity to explain the reasons for that change.

In August 2005, after two decades of political tyranny, bribery and increasing corruption, the armed forces and security forces intervened to put an end to the grave abuses that threatened the structure and very existence of the Mauritanian State. That move by the Military Council for Justice and Democracy led to a transitional democratic phase, which successfully concluded in April 2007. Mauritanians and international observers alive attested to the fairness and transparency of that phase. The Mauritanian experiment in democracy became an example worthy of emulation. The satisfaction of various national and international observers and the support of civil society added to the success of the experiment. A series of elections were held, with the support of international partners, leading to the ratification by popular referendum of the Constitution in June 2006.

A Parliament with two chambers was elected in November of the same year; a new president of the Republic was elected in March 2007; and a new law for the organization of the press was enacted in October 2006, establishing a higher authority for the press, radio and television. With respect to good governance, a new general inspectorate of the State was established; transparency initiative was implemented in the field of extracting industries; public officials were compelled to disclose their financial affairs and property; and public transactions are now undertaken in a transparent manner. Lastly, women were accorded a quota of 20 per cent of all candidatures in our Islamic republic. As a result, 18 women were elected to the current Parliament.

Those splendid achievements, in addition to the atmosphere of harmony and accord enjoyed by the people of Mauritania, are the result of the work of the military establishment, which pledged to complete the process within the announced time frame and indeed kept its promise. Once the former President assumed office, anything was possible in the new Mauritania, with all its new institutional gains, in terms of consolidating and deepening the achievements of the transitional period of 2005 to 2007. Regrettably, from the outset the former President demonstrated his weakness and inability to lead the country and confront the many challenges it faced.

Conditions in the country continued to seriously deteriorate over the following 15 months in the political, security, economic and social fields. The deteriorating situation posed a real threat to the country's peace, security and stability. Indeed, it threatened the very existence and foundations of the State.

Thus our country has, over the past three months, undergone an institutional crisis that led to an interruption in the work of parliamentary institutions and paralysed the affairs of the State, the stability of which was threatened by the intransigence of the executive authority, which prevented Parliament from exercising its constitutional powers.

In order to secure the loyalty of some parliamentarians from the majority party who were unhappy with the difficult situation and concerned about the future of the country, the former President resorted to certain illegal measures that would be unacceptable in any democratic system. He used public funds to buy the allegiance of some parliamentarians. In addition, he made some irregular appointments and arbitrarily fired some high-ranking public officials in order to stem the people's desire for change. Moreover, he continuously threatened to dissolve Parliament in order to prevent the formation of a parliamentary committee to investigate the sources of financing of a private business created by his family.

The President returned to the Chair.

In the field of security and as a result of his laxity and refusal to heed the advice of the security services, a number of terrorist acts took place for the first time in the country's history, following the release of a number of terrorists who had been in custody until he took office.

Economically and socially, the situation was simply disastrous. While the people suffered in poverty, hunger and disease, the former President — who, in the aftermath of floods that hit the country, had visited only one city inside Mauritania, the city of Tintane — made 25 visits abroad, costing Mauritanian taxpayers huge amounts of money, without achieving any tangible results in the field of cooperation between Mauritania and its development partners.

The former President continuously and intentionally obstructed the work of democratic institutions and thus paralysed the State. Faced with the failure of his manoeuvres, he resorted to firing high-ranking officials in the leadership of the army and the security services at the same time. That almost led to a confrontation between high-ranking officers and created a situation that could have brought the country to the brink of civil war.

In view of the political impasse, the armed forces and security forces, conscious of the serious dangers to the country, intervened to correct the abuses and to strengthen national unity and other gains made in the country, as well as its prospects for development and progress. That change enjoys the support of two thirds of the members of Parliament, approximately 90 per cent of mayors and two thirds of recognized political parties, in addition to civil society organizations, including cultural and professional societies. Support has also been come from unprecedented popular marches.

The High Council of State declared its commitment to protecting democracy and enhancing democratic processes in Mauritania; guaranteeing the

continued regular functioning of State institutions; allowing officially recognized political parties to carry out their activities; guaranteeing freedom of the press and the media; respecting the obligations, agreements and international treaties concluded in the name of the Mauritanian State; and organizing free and transparent elections at the earliest possible date.

Aware of the importance of and need for integration among countries and peoples of the world, Mauritania reaffirms its adherence to the Arab Maghreb Union as a strategic choice of the people of the region, the League of Arab States, the African Union and the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

In the same spirit, we reiterate our support for efforts to reform the United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council. We believe that the African continent should be given permanent representation on the Security Council; Africa has been the only continent without permanent representation in the Council since the creation of this Organization. We also call for giving the Arab Group representation in the Security Council in view of the fact that it represents more than 11 per cent of the peoples of the world. We support granting permanent seats in the Security Council to Japan and Germany, since both countries play a vital role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Allow me to pay special tribute to the great efforts made at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in the field of development, especially with respect to the steep rise in food prices and all other goods, the financing of development projects and the problem of greenhouse gases and their effect on the planet.

The sixty-third session of the General Assembly falls at a very difficult time, when the world is confronting sharp increases in food prices, that negatively affect the economies of developing countries and could even undermine the economic structure of those countries if no urgent measures are taken to address the problem. The food crisis facing the world requires concerted international efforts and strategies to overcome its negative effects.

Today, we are halfway to the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. However, many developing countries are still far from achieving those Goals. That is why we call on rich countries to keep their promises to finance development in the developing world.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is a source of tension and a threat to international peace and security in a vital and sensitive region of the world. That is why my country supports the efforts to settle the conflict in a manner that guarantees the Palestinian people the restoration of their rights and the establishment of their own State, with Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with the State of Israel.

As regards the question of the Sudan, we totally and categorically reject the most recent developments, in particular the request of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant for the President of the Sudan. We believe that such a move would jeopardize peace efforts in that brotherly country and increase tensions in that sensitive region of the world.

My country follows the question of the Western Sahara with interest. While we welcome the latest steps taken to return to the negotiating table, we also renew our support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to reach a final settlement acceptable to both parties.

The dissemination of the culture of peace and the spirit and values of tolerance among peoples and civilizations, the restoration of rights and the realization of justice among peoples are, in our view, the best way to maintain peace and security in the world. The fact that certain questions that have gone unresolved for so long, the widening gap between the poor and the rich, the unfair structure of the global economy and the absence of any attempt to spread justice, equality and fairness have all contributed to the creation of conflicts and to the phenomena of extremism and terrorism.

We in Mauritania condemn and reject terrorism in all its forms. We are equally committed to adhering to our tolerant Islamic values, which reject violence and extremism and call for tolerance and brotherhood. We believe that the international family should seriously consider the causes of the phenomenon of terrorism and ways to confront and eradicate it fully from the world.

We affirm the importance accorded by developing countries to development as we look forward with hope to the results of the Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development scheduled

from 29 November to 2 December 2008. We also would like to express our concern at the deadlock of the Doha Round of trade negotiations and call on industrialized countries to show more flexibility and stronger political will in that respect.

Development has economic, social and environmental dimensions. Any shortcomings in any one of those dimensions negatively affects the others. That is why we highlight the need to address the phenomenon of climate change. My country is one of the 10 countries that would be the most vulnerable to the effects of greenhouse gas emissions if they should cause a rise in sea levels. We call on industrial countries to limit the emissions that lead to greenhouse effects.

The commitments undertaken by the international community at the time of the establishment of this Organization will not be implemented unless all countries and peoples of the world are able to benefit from global resources and unless development efforts in the developing countries are supported with a view to creating conditions conducive to decent living in freedom and equality. Only then will we have honoured the commitments we have always affirmed.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Atoki Ileka, chairman of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to discharge the pleasant duty of conveying to you, Sir, the message of His Excellency, Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who is unable to attend and therefore asked me to convey to you his sincerest congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. He has no doubt that your great experience, enriched by your skills and knowledge, will allow you to fulfil the heavy responsibility that has been entrusted to you, to the satisfaction of all.

I should also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, and congratulate him on the dedication and skill with which he fulfilled his mandate. Finally, I should like to pay due homage to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose reforming efforts, commitment and energy have enhanced the role of the United Nations and made it more credible to Member States and to international public opinion.

This session is opening at a particularly difficult moment for humanity. The international financial crisis, the sharp rises in the cost of food, energy and fuel, and the effects of climate change are weakening economies throughout the world, particularly those of the developing countries. They are a threat to international peace and stability and therefore represent a major challenge to which the community of nations must respond in a concerted, decisive and tangible way.

With regard in particular to the global food crisis and the sharp rise in food prices, the Democratic Republic of Congo calls for new, innovative and urgent action to be taken beyond the recommendations made at the Rome Summit. We also endorse the appeal for the mobilization of the resources necessary for the World Food Programme to implement its strategic plan and achieve its priority mission. We are firmly convinced that human intelligence, which makes all scientific progress possible, should also allow us to eliminate hunger throughout the world, provided that we do so at the global level and that all States demonstrate the necessary political will. It is on the basis of that belief that the member countries of the Economic Community of Central African States held a regional meeting in Kinshasa in July in order to rise to the challenge posed to our subregion by the food crisis and the sharp rise in food costs. We made a frank diagnosis, and concrete and urgent measures were taken. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is determined to make an active contribution towards implementing those measures.

Similarly, the United Nations environmental conventions that the Democratic Republic of the Congo ratified include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

Home to 60 per cent of the forests of the Congo basin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is aware of the crucial role that it can play in controlling the global climate. It intends to assume that role in a fully responsible way, provided that the international community provides in exchange fair remuneration for the environmental goods and services that are provided by the forests of Congo to all humankind.

The fact that the different crises are affecting — though perhaps in different ways — all countries throughout the world without exception clearly demonstrates the futility of any claim to protective isolation. On the other hand, it demonstrates the common destiny of all humans and the justification for the dialogue of religions, cultures and civilizations, each of which must be protected and respected as an integral and irreplaceable part of the human heritage. We therefore commend the maturity of those States that have apologized or expressed regrets, and even offered compensation for the harm caused to others by slavery, colonization, aggressive behaviour or violations of fundamental human rights and the rights of peoples. That will leave in the collective universal memory an indelible testimony to those who, in the name of a transitory supremacy that scorned the true basic nature of the world, claimed eternal superiority and at one point in history claimed to have a lasting moral right over weaker people.

With the promise of a great future but weakened by years of bad government and war, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, thanks to the confidence of its people and the sustained support of the international community, has risen again as a State, a republic and a democracy. Indeed, following the success of our reunification and pacification efforts, and after exemplary presidential, legislative and provincial elections, the legitimate new authorities of our country launched a programme of reconstruction and are now ready to organize urban, municipal and local elections in order to allow the people to choose their own local representatives responsible for everyday affairs.

The improvement, however, needs to be shored up urgently, because two territories in North Kivu, out of the 142 that make up the Republic, are still the scene of a dangerous security situation that could undermine all the investments that have been made towards the rebirth of the country. In fact, because of one of the national armed groups, the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP), it has not yet been possible to enjoy the full benefits of the AMANI Forum — "Amani" means peace in Swahili — to implement the act of engagement signed at the Conference on Peace, Security and Development for the provinces of North and South Kivu, held in Goma from 6 to 25 January 2008 at the initiative of the Head of State. On the contrary, fighting has broken out again, which has created a massive displacement of populations and led to renewed violations of human rights.

With regard to the Nairobi communiqué, which was the basis for resolving the problem of the harmful presence in the same region of the country of armed elements from the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR). That group continues to sow death and destruction despite the progress that has been made elsewhere. That progress includes, first, the organization of information and awareness-raising programmes for armed Rwandan groups in order to ensure their voluntary participation in disarmament followed by their return to Rwanda, their country of origin, if they so wish, or to relocate them far from the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, or outside Congolese territory; secondly, the cantonment, disarmament and voluntary repatriation to Rwanda of several dozen FDLR elements and their dependants; and, finally, the deployment of special brigades of the Forces armies de la Republique démocratique du Congo, who will work with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) to compel, if necessary, reluctant FDLR elements to accept the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and resettlement or repatriation programme and to curtail their movements.

In the face of a resurgence in violence, the Head of State has taken the initiative once again by reasserting the Government's support for the Goma act of engagement and the AMANI Forum as the best way to put an end to the presence of armed groups in North and South Kivu and for the Nairobi communiqué to resolve the problem of the FDLR. Under his initiatives, a disengagement plan drawn up by MONUC has been adopted and a verification and monitoring mechanism is being developed. Accepted by the Government and the armed groups, with the exception of the CNDP, the plan will come into force on 1 October and end 45 days later.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo calls upon the Security Council to support the plan and provide MONUC with a clear mandate and adequate resources in order, if necessary, to impose peace and security in that part of the Congolese territory. The credibility of the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions — of which that in the Congo is by far the largest — are at stake.

The human conscience cannot tolerate and the people of Congo cannot understand how, despite having leaders legitimately elected by the people and who enjoy international recognition, a small group should be allowed to maintain a perpetual rebellion, entailing the rape of women and the loss of human life on a massive scale. In the face of the tragedy in the eastern Congo, MONUC should be authorized to act and be able to act convincingly. It is our firm belief that there could be no more legitimate use of force or timely exercise of the United Nations moral authority.

In addition to the efforts made to eliminate insecurity in the East of our country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is seeking to strengthen the rule of law, consolidate democracy and ensure good governance. Justice is therefore one of the pillars of our policy. For approximately 10 years now, our country has witnessed millions of deaths, the direct or indirect victims of armed conflicts. Entire families have been wiped out, mass graves abound, and violence against women has reached unprecedented levels. The country is trying to remedy the situation. For that reason, we supported Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) on women and peace and security, and we thank the Secretary-General for having placed the suffering of the women and girls of the Congo high on his agenda and for the support he has given us in that regard.

What we need most of all, however, and what the people of the Congo ardently desire and which we are duty-bound to guarantee to them is the right to justice. That means neither more nor less than putting an end to impunity. How can we prevent recidivism and copycat offences if, thanks to political horse-trading, criminals are not prosecuted? How can we put an end to the rape of women and girls and other massive violations of human rights if the warlords are exempt from legal prosecution because of their military strength or capacity for doing great harm? The logic of civilized society is specifically intended to counter the law of force with the force of the law.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have experienced the unique role that justice plays as a factor for national harmony and reconciliation, peace, security and stability. It is thanks to justice that we have been able to bring lasting peace to Ituri and North Katanga. It is with the support of justice that we intend to restore peace throughout our country. It will be national justice preferably, international justice if necessary, but justice in any case is a fundamental requirement. It is in that context that we must place efforts to rehabilitate the national judicial system, and it is in the same framework that we are cooperating with the International Criminal Court.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is also doing its very best to meet the fundamental needs of its people in the areas of healthcare, education, self-sufficiency in food, basic infrastructure, electricity, drinking water for all and, of course, efforts to counteract HIV/AIDS, malaria and, above all poverty. Five pillars have been established to that end. They involve infrastructure, employment, housing, education and health, and water and electricity. The complexity of those areas in a country as large as ours justifies the scope of the contributions we seek. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is therefore open to any partner that can help us meet the challenges of reconstruction and development.

All peoples of the world aspire to peace; hence the need for international and regional mechanisms and instruments for peacekeeping and conflict prevention and settlement. Therefore, the Democratic Republic of the Congo welcomes the fact that the Secretary-General has accepted our request to establish a United Nations Peacebuilding Office for Central Africa. We are convinced that the Office will promote greater closeness and coordination between the United Nations and the countries of the region. The issues of peace, security, humanitarian aid and development will be considered expeditiously and treated with the urgency that they merit.

In more global terms, we continue to support the efforts of the Organization in its various efforts to promote peace, security, human rights, gender equality and development. In that context, we call for accelerated reform of the United Nations and the Security Council, because achieving our dreams in the face of current and future challenges depends on it. The United Nations must change and adapt itself to meeting the new challenges of armed conflict, globalization, the lack of financial resources adequate to the breadth of its missions, pandemics, terrorism, and the need to buttress the system of collective security, particularly by enlarging the number of decision-makers in terms of international peace and security and by ensuring a more balanced and fair representation of the world in the Security Council. That is an indispensable democratic requirement for the proper and effective

functioning of the United Nations system. In that regard, the African continent should be represented as a permanent member of the Security Council.

Furthermore, the need for Security Council reform should not obscure the need to review other bodies of the United Nations system, particularly the Economic and Social Council and the Secretariat. The same applies to the working methods of the other councils and the International Court of Justice, which need to be revised, while their interaction with bodies yet to be created must be better identified and delineated. Similarly, efforts to revitalize the work of the General Assembly should continue and its authority strengthened in order to allow its President to play a key role in finding solutions to international problems.

It is said that nature only poses threats to humankind that its creativity is capable of addressing. Despite our differences, the time has come to put our individual imaginations together to ensure that the keys of the global economy are not left to out-and-out capitalism. We should instead use the universal values of justice, solidarity and altruism to promote peace and international security. We believe that, together, we can provide a better future for humanity so long as we work every day to achieve the ideals of our universal organization.

I wish every success to this sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Anders Lidén, chairman of the delegation of Sweden.

Mr. Lidén (Sweden): The United Nations was built on common values and norms. The United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other key documents not only express those values and norms, but also constitute international law, the foundation upon which every attempt to build a lasting peace must rest. Rules of international law apply equally to all States, large and small. According to the United Nations Charter, "Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means" and "refrain ... from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State". We look to the United Nations, and in particular to the Security Council, to uphold those rules. The five permanent members have a special responsibility in that regard.

Russia's invasion of Georgia — a sovereign State and a Member of the United Nations — using massive military force, is a clear violation of the United Nations Charter. Russia's subsequent recognition of parts of Georgia as independent States stands in stark contradiction to international law, including principles and commitments agreed in the context of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including the Helsinki Final Act. Sweden unreservedly supports the territorial integrity of Georgia. We call on Russia to fulfil its obligations in accordance with the six-point plan brokered by the European Union and to withdraw all forces to their positions before 7 August.

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While celebrating the achievements, we recognize the challenges that remain. The Declaration's historic article 21 on democracy, which reads in part: "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives", is a perfect illustration of that point. Since 1948, millions of people have gained the freedom of democratic choice, while millions of others are still denied that freedom.

Sweden places a strong emphasis on democracy and human rights in our development cooperation. Our efforts to make the Universal Declaration and other human rights norms a reality everywhere must also include the United Nations itself. Human rights should be an essential part of all United Nations activities, including conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, as well as in the work of the funds and programmes.

To fight terrorism is to defend human rights. Human rights are the key also to countering terrorism. Measures against terrorism will be effective and legitimate only when they are taken within a clear framework of international law. It is essential that the Security Council have fair and clear procedures in matters of listing and delisting when targeted sanctions have been imposed. The fight against impunity has to continue. We must support the International Criminal Court. Bringing to justice those responsible for the most serious crimes is vital to building sustainable peace. At the same time, justice should be pursued in a manner that supports peace processes.

States have a responsibility to protect people within their own borders from massive violations of

their human rights. If a State is not capable of doing so, it should ask the international community — the United Nations or regional organizations — for help. We must all be ready to assist. Not long ago, the United Nations and the African Union were able to help Kenya to prevent a frightening crisis from turning into the worst possible nightmare. If a State is unwilling to protect people within its borders, the Security Council must assume its responsibility to protect. We need a Security Council that is ready to shoulder that responsibility and to work together, because unilateral action might run the risk of aggravating the problem and undermining international law and legitimacy.

Violence against women and girls is a major obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by all people. Efforts to combat such violence must not end with a peace agreement. We must ensure that women have full access to justice, also in the transition from war to peace. Last June, the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security was followed up by Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence. It reaffirms that rape and other forms of sexual violence can be war crimes or crimes against humanity. It obliges Governments to combat such behaviour by all necessary means. Although the United Nations has made considerable efforts in that area, more needs to be done, both in the field and at Headquarters.

The European Union and the Council of Europe have established 10 October as the European Day against the Death Penalty. I hope that before too long we shall be able to agree on a United Nations day against that inhumane form of punishment.

We face a growing danger of nuclear proliferation. Iran, though not the only case, is the most worrisome at present. Recent developments in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea also give cause for concern. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the cornerstone of non-proliferation and the foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. Sweden is strongly committed to upholding and further strengthening existing multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation obligations. The nuclear Powers have taken on special commitments within the NPT process. In order not to undermine the Treaty, they must demonstrate their readiness to substantially reduce their nuclear arsenals.

More efforts are needed, in particular in Africa, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Therefore, Sweden is increasing its support to Africa. We encourage others to do the same, as well as to deliver on the aid commitments already made. In the long run, the rise in the price of energy and food could have a positive effect on development in the agricultural sector. In the short run, however, it could jeopardize the fulfilment of the MDGs and threaten progress already made. Communicable diseases, not least HIV/AIDS, are another obstacle to the achievement of the MDGs that we must address. The Accra meeting on the Paris Declaration took important steps towards better aid effectiveness and reconfirmed the shared responsibility for development. However, much more must be done in areas such as democratic governance and human rights, the role of women in development, and the impact of global climate change.

That is a challenge for developing and developed countries alike. The world economy is facing turbulence and uncertainty. A more open trade regime would bring increased economic growth and interdependence, which in turn would have a significant stabilizing effect. Trade policy is one of the tools to help developing countries become integrated into the world economy and reap the benefits of trade. Trade reforms are fundamental for sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. We regret the failure to reach a breakthrough in the World Trade Organization Doha Round. We all share a responsibility to resolve the few remaining issues.

The United Nations system — both in the field and at Headquarters — must be reformed in order to ensure coherence and effectiveness. Reforms must also enable the United Nations to work more effectively on gender issues and for the promotion of equal rights and opportunities.

The United Nations needs to bolster its capacity to handle the unprecedented demand for peace operations. Cooperation with regional organizations and arrangements, such as the European Union, NATO and the African Union, is essential.

Sweden strongly supports efforts to bridge crisis management and long-term development in post-conflict situations. By chairing the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, we hope to be able to contribute to further developing the role of the United Nations in peacebuilding.

Sweden was proud to host the first annual review meeting of the International Compact with Iraq. The partnership between the Government of Iraq and the United Nations is crucial. It is therefore imperative to continue strengthening the role of the United Nations in Iraq.

It is the poorest who are the hardest hit by climate change. Therefore, Sweden is providing additional resources for a special climate initiative in our development cooperation. It aims to contribute effectively to long-term efforts to combat climate change and its effects in developing countries.

Climate change is a crucial challenge facing our planet. We recognize our responsibility to take concrete steps at home and to show the leadership necessary to achieve broad and long-term international consensus. One year from now, Sweden will hold the presidency of the European Union. In that capacity, Sweden will take on a special responsibility regarding efforts to put an international climate agreement in place by 2009 in Copenhagen. The key to a successful conclusion of those negotiations, however, rests with each and every one of us.

It is time to once again remind ourselves of our mutual commitments and to stand up for the universal principles underpinning international cooperation. It is time to muster the political will to reassert our shared values. It is time to show that we are determined to work jointly to foster peace, democracy and development worldwide.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Celestino Migliore, chairman of the delegation of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): As the last speaker on your list, Mr. President, I think I can congratulate you on this important debate, and quote the Latin saying, *dulce est in fundo*, which you know very well — sweetness comes at the end.

As you assume the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, my delegation wishes you all the best in your endeavours and looks forward to working with you in order to address the many challenges facing the global community.

This general debate is an occasion for those responsible for the national life of every country to come together to take the pulse of the world situation. By its nature and structure, the United Nations normally creates neither events nor trends, but rather serves as a sounding board where events and trends are submitted for debate and a coherent, consensual and timely response.

This year has been dominated by a number of challenges and crises: natural and man-made calamities, staggering economies, financial turmoil, rising food and fuel prices, the impact of climate change, local wars and tensions. We have been called to this Hall once again to identify the common causes and denominators underlying those diverse crises and to craft adequate long-term solutions.

One of the clear facts, recognized by all, is that every crisis presents a mixture of natural factors and elements of human responsibility. However, they are all too often compounded by the tardy responses, failures or reluctance of leaders to exercise their responsibility to protect their populations.

When speaking within these walls of the responsibility to protect, the common understanding of the term is found in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, which refers to the responsibility of the international community to intervene in situations where individual Governments are not able or willing to assure the protection of their own citizens.

In the past, the language of protection was too often a pretext for expansion and aggression. In spite of the many advances in international law, that same understanding and practice tragically continues today. However, during the past year, in this same Hall there has been growing consensus and greater inclusion of this expression as a vital component of responsible leadership. The responsibility to protect has been invoked by some as an essential aspect of the exercise of sovereignty at the national and international levels, while others have relaunched the concept of the exercise of responsible sovereignty.

For his part, Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the General Assembly last April, also recognized that, from the very ancient philosophical discourses on governance to the more modern development of the nation State, the responsibility to protect has served and must continue to serve as the principle shared by all nations in governing their populations and regulating relations between peoples. Those statements reassert the historical and moral basis for States to govern. Likewise, they reassert that good governance

should no longer be measured simply within the context of a State's rights or sovereignty, but rather by its ability to care for those who entrust it with the grave moral responsibility to lead.

We the peoples who formed the United Nations conceived the responsibility to protect as the core basis for the United Nations. The founding leaders believed that the responsibility to protect would consist not primarily of the use of force in order to restore peace and human rights, but rather in States coming together to detect and denounce early symptoms of every kind of crisis, mobilizing Governments, civil society and public opinion to find the causes and to offer solutions. The various agencies and bodies of the United Nations also reaffirm the importance of the responsibility to protect in their ability to work in close proximity and solidarity with affected populations and to put detection, implementation and monitoring mechanisms into place. It is incumbent not only upon States, but also upon the United Nations to ensure that the responsibility to protect serves as the underlying measure and motivation of all its work.

While many continue to question and debate the real causes and medium- and long-term consequences of the various financial, humanitarian and food crises around the world, the United Nations and its membership have the responsibility to provide direction, coherence and resolution. It is not only the credibility of the Organization and our global leaders that is at stake, but rather and more importantly the ability of the human community to provide food and security and to protect basic human rights so that all peoples have the opportunity to live with freedom from fear and want, thus realizing their inherent dignity.

One area in which our best intentions require urgent action is climate change. My delegation commends Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his leadership in recognizing the urgency of tackling that issue, and we commend States and civil society for making the necessary political and personal sacrifices to ensure a better future.

The challenge of climate change and the various solutions proposed and put into action have led us to call attention to a preoccupation and inconsistency existing today in the realm of international and national law — that all that is technically possible must be legally licit.

In adopting ever more stringent norms to protect the environment and nature, it is often rightly affirmed that not all environmental activity should be allowed and sanctioned by law just because it is technically possible and economically profitable. Indiscriminate deforestation, the dumping of radioactive waste and invasive and devastating acts on nature are often more expedient and technically possible, but because they provoke our conscience, as well as our responsibility towards creation, we decide to invoke the principle that even though it is possible it should not be legally licit.

However, when passing from the ecological field to that of humans, we have a tendency to affirm the opposite principle — that all which is technically possible should be legally licit and consequently pursued. Whether regarding the production of arms for war, biotechnological engineering, the taking of human life, reproductive technology or the structure of the family itself, we have the tendency to advocate that all which is technologically possible should also be legally licit. That inconsistency calls into question whether we truly place humans at the centre of decision-making.

The global community must come together to reverse that contradiction and engage in a political discourse that recognizes the centrality of humans in all aspects of political and technological development. The same principles that lead us to oppose unchecked technology and policies that destroy the environment should also guide us in our prudent use of technologies and the creation of policies that directly impact the lives of individuals. Short of that, we will succumb to an inconsistency that penalizes the individual and human society and risks paving the way towards the imposition of laws by the more powerful and the creation of a new mass of losers.

As we embark on this session of the General Assembly, we strive to fashion an Organization that reflects our highest and best intentions and carefully places the needs of all people, regardless of their economic and political standing, at the centre of our decisions and responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate.

Before giving the floor to those representatives who have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply, I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply should be limited to 10 minutes for

the first statement and five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): My delegation attentively listened to the blatant and meaningless accusation made by the Foreign Minister of Eritrea against my country. In exercise of our right of reply, I wish to state the following to set the record straight.

Ethiopia rejects the imaginary Eritrean claim that Ethiopia occupies Eritrean sovereign territory. On the contrary, it was in fact the belligerent regime in Asmara that declared an unwarranted war of aggression against Yemen, against the Sudan, against Ethiopia and now against Djibouti. Eritrea is now illegally occupying Djibouti's territory.

We believe that the continued silence of the international community, including the United Nations most particularly, in not categorically deploring such behaviour has only resulted in further emboldening the regime in Asmara. They must be told that enough is enough with their rogue politics.

The cause of all this is the total absence of institutions in Asmara. In Eritrea today, there is only a one-man show and accountability is unheard of. The one man is the President; he is the Government; he is the State; and he is the country itself. Eritrea is the only country in Africa today which is not ruled, let alone by a constitution, but even by a mere presidential decree. It is a country ruled by an absolute dictatorship in whose solitary regime and solitary empire, the term election — let alone the institution of elections — is a culpable derogation. It is a country thrown into the abyss of absolute and unfortunate isolation by the very acts and conducts of its ruthless dictatorial regime.

To set the record straight, Ethiopia is in Somalia not as an invading force, but at the invitation of the Transitional Federal Institutions in Somalia — the Government and the Parliament of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia. Ethiopia is therefore a force of stabilization and not, like Eritrea, destabilization.

It is Eritrea, rather, that is hosting regional and international terrorists whose names are still to be found on the consolidated list of terrorists documented by the Security Council. Eritrea is directly supporting and collaborating with the terrorists and spoilers of Somalia. I wish therefore to stress that Ethiopia once again urges the international community to call a spade a spade and note that the conduct of the regime in Asmara is unacceptable to the civilized world.

It is clear that Eritrea has made a strategic decision. It is not prepared to discuss any normalization of relations or indeed to coexist with Ethiopia and the countries of the region. We are the target of continued destabilization activities offered and perpetuated by the rogue regime in Eritrea. Let it be underlined that Eritrea's trouble with all its neighbours emanates essentially not from any legitimate disagreement over boundary, but rather from the troublesome character of its own Government. The persistent belligerence of the Eritrean Government towards all of its neighbours — Yemen, the Sudan, Ethiopia, and now its recent invasion of Djibouti — demonstrates its unacceptable rogue conduct in our subregion.

Allow me to reiterate to the Assembly that Ethiopia agrees with the Security Council's constantly affirmed view that the primary responsibility for the resolution of the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea rests with the parties themselves. Eritrea should realize that solutions to the boundary dispute or any other differences can be arrived at by the two parties only in a peaceful manner.

Ethiopia remains firmly committed to the principle that dialogue is the only way to settle all outstanding issues with Eritrea. Eritrea must unequivocally understand that the option of violence is a non-starter. Its leaders need only resort to peaceful means of resolving whatever differences they may have with their neighbours. Eritrea should weigh the long-term interests of the peoples of the two countries and the subregion in general, rather than wickedly pursuing some imaginary short-sighted and short-lived objectives.

Mr. Desta (Eritrea): I take the floor in exercise of the right of reply in connection with the statement made by the representative of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has made several false and unsubstantiated allegations against Eritrea, and in the interest of time I am not going to honour them by responding to each one. Furthermore, it is not the wish of my delegation at this late hour, during the closing of the general debate, to enter into accusations and counter-accusations that contribute little to the peace and security of the region.

It is, however, important to set the record straight. Had Ethiopia not reneged on its acceptance of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission award when it was announced in 2002, and had it cooperated fully with the Commission in its implementation, the issues between the two countries could have been resolved then and there and the successful conclusion of the peace agreement would have brought the hard suffering of both peoples to an end in 2003.

It is a matter of record that Ethiopia and its appeasers did everything in their power to frustrate and undermine the authority and the decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, established by the parties pursuant to article 4.2 of the Algiers Agreement, in the hope of changing the award more to Ethiopia's liking.

Indeed, Ethiopia chose to flout international law under the cover of talks on normalization, third parties and the facilitation of human geography, and sometimes by comparing the Eritrea-Ethiopia settlement mechanism to other situations, such as that between Cameroon and Nigeria. Those are entirely different in context and mandate. They have been the gimmicks resorted to several times by Ethiopia in its attempts to escape the treaty obligations that it undertook in Algiers in the presence of eminent personalities of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the United States, Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa. Eritrea has not occupied any Ethiopian land or territory. The way forward to peace and stability in the region is therefore for Ethiopia to withdraw unequivocally from sovereign Eritrean territories.

On Somalia, it requires no elaboration to know that Ethiopia invaded Somalia in contravention of Security Council resolutions and Intergovernmental Authority on Development decisions. Any attempt to portray as legitimate the illegal and sinister occupation of Somalia and the interferences in its affairs is a mockery. As attested to by the Somali people and several observers, the administration of the Union of Islamic Courts during the six months prior to the occupation brought a semblance of order and stability to the country for the first time since 1991. If left alone, the process would have allowed the Somalis to find their own solution to their own problem.

The President: We have concluded the general debate of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I thank delegations for speaking with the candour that is required in facing challenges that will, if unchecked, bring about the end of life as we know it.

We have all recognized that this debate takes place during a particularly troubling time for the world. Many delegations have argued that we cannot continue with business as usual. I agree. I believe that the stage is being set for changes that will bring genuine democracy to the United Nations. With it, we will be able to introduce profound changes that will realize the promises of the Charter to we the people.

We have heard from 111 heads of State and Government. I am very heartened that most reflected on the proposed theme for this general debate, "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world as well as the need to democratize the United Nations". By so doing, we have outlined once again our priority concerns and reaffirmed our conviction that this uniquely representative body remains the most important and most democratic forum for global debate. The General Assembly enables the dialogue that is essential to identifying and, more importantly, to agreeing on solutions to our most pressing problems, but it is only when all voices are heard that we can expect to implement truly comprehensive solutions.

As delegations all pointed out, we are meeting at a time when our deeply flawed global economic system is teetering on the brink of collapse. Each of us recognizes the seriousness of the crisis, which has its roots in a mania of selfishness that has come to dominate today's culture of "I and mine". We have heard more about "we and ours" during this debate. Those appealing for courage and compassion have far outnumbered those who inspire fear and distrust.

The current financial turmoil is perhaps most starkly reflected in the world food crisis that we agreed would provide the underlying theme for this debate. It is astonishing that, after 63 years, we are still facing the shameful fact that hundreds of millions of people suffer from hunger and malnutrition. That is madness and reflects how upside down our priorities have become. Still, in recent days we have heard a number of concrete and far-ranging proposals that, if implemented, would prevent the food crisis from becoming a prolonged catastrophe.

The input of members to the Assembly over the past two weeks is heartening. It is clear that we are

now acutely aware that the confluence of crises facing us — including even many of our calamitous natural disasters — are of human origin. As such, they require human solutions. Throwing our hands up in despair is not an option. As leaders, we must join hands in solidarity and confront our failures together.

We must be brave enough to challenge the vast inequities that exist in the world; we must take steps to defuse the time bombs that are ticking at the heart of virtually all of our societies; and, as unappealing as it may sound, that will require sacrifices from all of us. We must reorder our priorities if we are to fulfil the promises of security and well-being that billions of people have trusted in us to keep.

There are undeniable signs that we are getting our priorities straight. We have decided to focus first and foremost on the most vulnerable: the billions of people who are living in abject poverty and neglect. In that spirit, we dedicated our time to two high-level meetings, on the special needs of Africa and on the Millennium Development Goals. I was gratified to hear the passionate calls for solidarity with our African brothers and sisters. And the new level of concern and support for the Millennium Development Goals reflects a deep and genuine commitment to keep our promises to those for whom prosperity remains an impossible dream.

I would like here to commend His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General, for his dedication and for his tireless efforts to make those events a real success.

These high-level meetings have generated unmistakable momentum for a successful gathering in Doha in November, when we shall consolidate the promises around financing for development. Those commitments will remain the focus of our deliberations throughout the sixty-third session.

We have heard urgent appeals for a stronger United Nations. We must overcome our failures of the twentieth century and move into the twenty-first century with renewed confidence that this Organization can indeed fulfil its obligations to the world. Leaders expressed enthusiastic support for the decision by the Assembly (decision 62/557) to enter into serious negotiations about the makeup of the Security Council in the months ahead.

That discussion is central to the future of the United Nations. We are ready. We have agreed to hold three thematic debates around the importance of democratization, not only of the Security Council, but of the Bretton Woods institutions and other international financial institutions as well.

All of this relates to the General Assembly, the most representative body in the world. We must restore to the Assembly the authority that was intended in the Charter. We must give meaning to the concept of the sovereign equality of all Member States proclaimed by the Charter. If we do not have democratic rule at the United Nations, how can we demand it for the rest of the world?

I hope we can take to heart the appeals that we have heard over and over again during this general debate. Those appeals have been in various languages. They reflect the needs of cultures even more diverse than our 192 Member States. But they come down to an essential truth: we are all brothers and sisters and, if we hope to climb out of the terrible mess we have created, we must treat each other with respect and love.

Call it compassion. Call it brotherhood and sisterhood. Call it stewardship. Call it solidarity. The idea is the same in all parts of the world. We owe it to one another. We owe it to Mother Earth, who is struggling to survive our abuses. We owe it to succeeding generations. Let us join forces to ensure that we rise to these challenges together, setting aside our petty differences. We can — we must — make a difference in the months ahead. And for that, we have a very clear mandate from our heads of State or Government, ministers and the other high-level representatives who have addressed the Assembly over the past six days.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

May I consider that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 8?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 8.45 p.m.

United Nations A/63/PV.17

General Assembly
Sixty-third session

Official Records

17th plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

High-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action

Agenda item 52

Groups of countries in special situations

(b) Specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries: outcome of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/165)

Draft resolution (A/63/L.3*)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 62/204 of 19 December 2007, will now begin the two-day high-level meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Members will recall that in resolution 62/204 the General Assembly requested the President of the General Assembly to convene consultations during the sixty-second session of the Assembly to facilitate the preparation of an outcome document for the midterm review and to finalize its organizational aspects. In this regard, in a letter dated 29 September 2008, I informed members of the speakers for this opening plenary meeting.

Members will further recall that the two-day meeting will consist of plenary meetings and a panel discussion.

(*spoke in English*)

I am very pleased to welcome everyone to this high-level plenary meeting on the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. Over the next two days we will focus our attention on the impressive work under way to ensure that landlocked developing countries have transit transport systems to facilitate their access to international trade despite their physical isolation.

Earlier this week the General Assembly concluded its general debate. I was very pleased that we devoted our time and effort to two high-level meetings on the special needs of Africa and on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both meetings were of particular interest to landlocked countries. It is notable that nine of the fourteen countries with the lowest human development index scores last year are landlocked.

World leaders were in agreement that the turmoil of the world's financial markets must not jeopardize the funding commitments made to Africa and to the MDGs. Representatives of landlocked developing countries know more than anyone the vulnerability of their economies to erratic markets and soaring transportation costs. I promise to do all that I can as

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08-53281 (E)

President of the General Assembly to assure the continuing support of the international community for landlocked nations.

We are living in troubled times, and billions of people are looking to the United Nations to fulfil the promises of security and well-being that they have entrusted to us.

As I look at the accomplishments since the 2003 Almaty Conference, I am heartened to see the central and effective role the United Nations is playing in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Facilitating negotiations and assisting in the implementation of complex development projects is what the United Nations is all about. The success of the Programme can only strengthen the United Nations at a time when it is looking to enhance its participation in international economic policy-making.

The 2003 Almaty Conference aimed to forge global partnerships to address the special needs of the countries concerned by tackling their continued marginalization from the world economy in a focused, but holistic, fashion.

The resulting Almaty Programme of Action outlines a clear set of priorities for action in transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international trade and trade facilitation, and international support measures.

There has been considerable progress since the Almaty Programme of Action was adopted five years ago. Thanks to their cooperative efforts, donor nations, a range of international, regional and subregional organizations and financial institutions have stepped up their targeted assistance and support for the landlocked and transit developing countries.

In and of itself, the decision by the General Assembly to convene the present midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action reflects the commitment of the international community to the Programme's full and effective implementation.

However, much more needs to be done to achieve the Programme's overarching goal of establishing efficient transit transport systems in all landlocked regions of the world.

Geographical realities, coupled with critical infrastructure deficiencies, as well as cumbersome border crossing procedures, continue to pose daunting impediments to the external trade of landlocked developing countries.

Landlocked country export development is severely constrained by rising transit transport costs. These limit the range of potential exports and markets in which goods can be competitively and profitably traded.

Today, high trade transaction costs remain the single most important obstacle to equitable and competitive access by landlocked countries to global markets.

This midterm review is an extremely important exercise to assess what has been achieved so far and what can be done better. It will guide the second half of the implementation period of the Almaty Programme so that it can more effectively assist landlocked developing countries in their effective integration in the international trading system.

We know that success thus far has depended on a range of partners. They have enabled the establishment of more effective transit transport systems that benefit landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours in all regions of the world.

The generosity and support of Member States has been, and will be, crucial to safeguard the progress achieved and to accelerate progress in the years ahead. In this regard, I would like to express special thanks to Mr. Yukio Takasu of Japan for his excellent work in facilitating the negotiation process of the outcome document that Member States are expected to adopt tomorrow.

Let us all reaffirm in the course of this meeting the crucial importance of these partnerships, with the United Nations systems chief among them.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I now call on the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Last week I convened a high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We used the occasion to review progress towards attaining the MDGs. I sounded alarm bells that we were running out of time to honour commitments made to the developing world.

The response was overwhelming. Governments, foundations, civil society groups and businesses joined

hands. We managed to forge new partnerships and prepare new action plans to speed up progress. We generated unprecedented commitments in pledges to help the world's poor. The final figures are not in yet, but the total may be as much as $16 billion. I am now more hopeful about attaining the MDGs by 2015.

Today we are sounding alarm bells for the Almaty Programme of Action. I hope for a similarly hope-inspiring response.

Too many of the landlocked developing countries are not on track to meeting the MDGs. According to the United Nations Development Programme, they account for 10 of the 20 countries with the lowest level of human development.

It is vital that landlocked developing countries increase their volume of exports in order to meet the MDGs. Currently the world's 31 landlocked developing countries account for less than 1 per cent of global merchandise trade.

The single biggest obstacle to increasing this share is the very high cost of transport. In some landlocked developing countries, transport costs can exceed 70 per cent of the export value. This has become a bigger barrier to trade than tariffs. Clearly, we need a more vigorous effort for international cooperation.

There has been some encouraging progress in implementing the Almaty Programme. Many countries are improving transit transport policies. This is making it easier for landlocked countries to use neighbouring countries' ports and roads. Trade facilitation has also reduced the costs of doing business.

Much more now needs to be done in the area of infrastructure development. Roads and railways remain inadequate. Many ports are using obsolete cargo handling equipment. We need to mobilize more international support in order to improve infrastructure.

The Millennium Summit of September 2000 committed to addressing the special needs of landlocked developing countries. The Almaty Programme of Action translates that commitment into specific actions.

The United Nations supports the Almaty Programme by working with countries to develop integrated transport networks; modernize customs operations; build capacities for trade negotiations; and develop indicators for monitoring progress. We are building partnerships with financial institutions and regional development banks in our activities.

The achievements so far are encouraging. But we need full implementation by all partners in order to make significant progress. Let us use the success of the high-level event on the MDGs as inspiration for this review.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Mongolia, His Excellency Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar.

President Enkhbayar: I am pleased to address the opening meeting of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

I strongly commend the leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in galvanizing the activities of the United Nations system organizations in our concerted efforts to implement the Programme. Mongolia also extends its high appreciation to High Representative Cheick Diarra and his Office for the coherent coordination of all the preparatory activities in the lead-up to this high-level review.

Over the coming two days we will engage in an extensive discussion to take stock of the progress achieved so far in moving forward the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, to share the lessons learned and identify future actions to speed up its realization through addressing the still persistent constraints.

It is gratifying to note that over the last five years the landlocked and transit developing countries, with the support of their developed partners, have registered certain headway in all five priority areas of the Programme. They have strengthened their policy reform efforts, including the liberalization of transit and transport services; increased accession to relevant international conventions; the establishment of regional inter-modal transport corridors; and harmonization of common rules and standards.

The international community has come to better recognize that high transit transport costs represent a more important barrier than most favoured nation tariffs for landlocked developing countries. As a result it is encouraging that there is a much broader recognition of the special needs of landlocked developing countries per se and a stronger engagement

of development partners with respect to transport infrastructure development and trade facilitation, as well as aid, debt relief and market access.

Multilateral and development institutions and regional organizations also tend to allocate greater attention and resources to the establishment of efficient transit systems. All these efforts are encouraging and ought to be further consolidated for the effective and full implementation of the Programme.

The past few years have been somewhat favourable for the overall economic development and growth of landlocked developing countries as a group. According to the Secretary-General's report (A/63/165), the gross domestic product of the landlocked developing countries grew annually by almost 8 per cent in the period 2003-2006. Foreign direct investment has also seen a certain increase over the same period. In addition, as of 2006 more than 90 per cent of exports of landlocked developing countries to developed markets enjoyed duty-free access, a significant increase from 70 per cent back in 2003.

Despite these positive developments, landlocked developing countries continue to face considerable challenges inherently linked to their geographical handicap. Over the past decade, their share in world exports has remained unacceptably dismal — well below 0.6 per cent — with commodities accounting for the bulk of exports.

In our case, transit transport costs through Russia and China amount to up to 8 per cent of our GDP. Hence, with a view to promoting a comprehensive subregional agreement designed to harmonize transit regulations and reduce transit transport costs, Mongolia has initiated a Tripartite Framework Agreement on Transit Transportation with its two neighbours. The draft agreement has been agreed in principle, and negotiations continue on annexes.

The agreement, once concluded, will provide a legal framework for efficient transit systems to and through Mongolia by allowing freedom of transit by all modes of transport and promoting simplification, harmonization and standardization of customs, administrative procedures and documentation.

Subregional and regional cooperation and integration of landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours play an important role in effectively addressing cross-border trade and transit transport problems. In this context, we welcome the regional initiatives aimed at promoting the development of regional rail and road transit transport networks, including the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Agreements, to which Mongolia has already become a party.

The continued marginalization of landlocked developing countries from the international trading system prevents them from fully using trade as an instrument for achieving the respective MDGs. It is disheartening that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (2007-2008) shows that 10 out of 20 of the lowest-ranking countries in the human development index were landlocked developing countries. Their situation is being further exacerbated by the current global food, energy and financial crises.

In this regard, we need to seize this opportunity of reviewing the implementation of the Programme to explore new avenues on how to urgently respond to these global development challenges, both existing and emerging.

Increased international assistance for export diversification, infrastructure development, institutional capacity-building and better market access are essential for landlocked developing countries. As high transaction cost represents the main cause of the marginalization of these countries from the international trading system, the current negotiations on market access for agricultural and non-agricultural goods should, in our view, give particular attention to products from landlocked developing countries.

In addition, trade facilitation negotiations, especially the part on GATT article V, present an opportunity to set internationally applicable rules and standards that are most urgently needed. In this respect, I reiterate my earlier proposal, voiced at the Ulaanbaatar thematic meeting last year to consider negotiating a separate, multilateral agreement on issues covered by GATT Article V on Freedom of Transit.

The Ulaanbaatar meeting on trade and trade facilitation and the Burkina Faso meeting on infrastructure development constitute an important part of the substantive preparations in the run-up to this midterm review. I gather that the publications on the outcome of these thematic meetings are being launched by the Office of the High Representative.

With a view to maximizing the efficiency of our coordinated efforts in promoting the interests of landlocked developing countries, including effective and full implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, I recently proposed to set up an international think-tank and offered to host it in Ulaanbaatar. I am pleased that this initiative has enjoyed active support from our fellow members of the group.

We are also hopeful that the relevant bodies of the United Nations system and international and regional financial institutions, along with our development partners, will step in to ensure its efficient and effective functioning.

As for the national implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, Mongolia has introduced several innovative measures to build policy framework and to promote public-private partnership. On my initiative, the MDG-based National Development Strategy — a comprehensive mid- and long-term development blueprint — was approved earlier this year. The Strategy makes human development and modernization of infrastructure as a key priority for making Mongolia a middle-income country by 2021.

Furthermore, a National Committee on Trade and Transport Facilitation, set in motion in 2005, is entrusted with a mandate to serve as a nationwide coordinator for the Programme's implementation. It is composed of representatives of government, the private sector, academia and non-governmental organizations to ensure a broad-based partnership.

Also, with active participation of all stakeholders, Mongolia has developed a comprehensive sector development Programme called Transit Mongolia incorporating all Programme priorities and Mongolia-specific goals. Hence, we believe that creation of a designated institutional mechanism along with the relevant plan of action lays a sound foundation for the Programme's effective implementation. In addition, active engagement of investors, both foreign and national, and the local business community helps to better mobilize the needed resources, both financial and human.

Finally, I wish to emphasize the crucial role of regional and international cooperation in ensuring effective implementation of the Programme. In this regard, my delegation fully endorses the related provisions in the draft outcome document to be adopted at the end of our review meeting.

We commend the considerable efforts made by United Nations bodies, in particular that of the Office of the High Representative, in coordinating system-wide activities towards Programme implementation. We also acknowledge the important work and support provided by our development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the regional commissions, the World Bank and the regional development banks.

I wish the Assembly a successful review with a productive outcome.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the President of Mongolia for the statement he has just made.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hamed Diane Semega, Minister of Equipment and Transport of Mali.

Mr. Semega (Mali) (*spoke in French*): As Mali's Minister of Equipment and Transport, and chairman of the Mali delegation, I wish on behalf of Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali and Chairman of the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries, to convey his fraternal greetings.

I also, on behalf of the 31 members of our Group, salute Mr. Choummaly Sayasone, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who has energetically and skilfully led the work of the Group since its foundation in 1994. His mandate has certainly yielded positive results; suffice it to recall his valuable, decisive role in the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action.

In addition, I thank the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, whose country hosted the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, a historic meeting, whose recommendations are enshrined in what is now known as the Almaty Programme.

The Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries expresses its gratitude to Ambassador Chowdhury, who, as Under-Secretary-General with responsibility for landlocked developing countries, showed a constant commitment and total devotion to

his noble mission and produced many relevant initiatives.

Finally, I warmly congratulate my compatriot Ambassador Cheick Sidi Diarra on the lofty mission which Mr Ban Ki-moon has entrusted to him.

The midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action that we are beginning comes five years after its adoption by resolution 58/201 of 23 December 2003.

The problems of development must be analysed within the framework of the globalization of economies. The landlocked developing countries are no exception. To the contrary, most of us are excluded from international trade, and those which do take part are largely at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the world economy.

I believe that it will be useful to outline the serious constraints imposed by geography on our countries in their struggle for economic and social development.

A few figures speak for themselves. The 31 landlocked developing countries cover 12.5 per cent of the surface of the globe, with their 16.3 million square kilometres, and have 370 million inhabitants, or 5.5 per cent of the world's population, which is estimated to be more than 6 billion, yet they generate only 2 per cent of the gross world product. Their fundamental characteristic is their distance from the sea, resulting in excessive transport costs. Kazakhstan is the landlocked country most distant from the sea, with its nearest accessible port 3,750 kilometres away. It is true that there are certain differences between our countries, which include some oil producers and exporters.

The external debt of the landlocked developing countries is becoming harder and harder to sustain. As to external trade, their competitiveness is greatly affected by everything to do with transport and transit. Therefore, with limited export resources, we must deplore the limited and very poorly diversified supply capacities, which usually result in only poor products. A consequence for the developing countries is a notorious weakness of their physical infrastructure, whose development is too costly for their budgets.

One last figure: the landlocked developing countries have transaction costs linked to transport averaging between 15 per cent and 25 per cent, about twice those of transit countries and more than three times those of the developed countries.

With all those facts, the challenges we face have never been so difficult as they are today. Three crises, including the international financial crisis, have hit us in swift succession, particularly in the last two years. If they have severely shaken the developed countries and less fragile developing countries, it is easy to imagine how much they threaten the very socio-economic and political foundations of the landlocked developing countries.

If the international community does not react with more determination and more consistently, the sacrifices made by the landlocked developing countries, together with our partners, will have been in vain. The encouraging results registered by these countries for more than a decade, particularly in restructuring and adapting their economies to the demands of globalization, will thus be wasted.

We are here at the midterm review to make clearly understood the strong apprehensions expressed in our countries and to mobilize the international community. The worsening situation of our countries requires action by all, particularly by the developed countries, but also, to a lesser extent, by the emerging countries.

In his report of 13 August 2007, the Secretary-General stated:

> "The midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action is an important exercise aimed at determining, among other things, what has been achieved so far, what could have been done better and how the second half of the implementation period can be effectively utilized to advance on the ultimate goal of assisting landlocked developing countries." (*A/62/226, para. 23*)

With globalization becoming more manifest every day, countries must be increasingly competitive in order to play a bigger part in the world's multilateral trade system, through the World Trade Organization, whose rules provide instruments allowing the developing countries to prepare themselves better for global competition.

By way of example I would mention the special and differential treatment, which, beyond granting transition periods to come up to the required level, will

make possible the granting of a period of time to implement technical assistance and strengthen the capacities of the landlocked developing countries.

In this regard, on behalf of the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries, I warmly thank the World Bank and the World Trade Organization for supporting our countries in establishing a methodology for self-evaluation of national situations. Such analysis will make possible notification of the time needed to implement their obligations and particularly details of technical assistance and strengthening of the necessary capacities.

My thanks also go to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for setting up a negotiating group of our countries and strengthening their capacity to familiarize national experts with the machinery of trade negotiations.

Today's meeting gives me an opportunity to thank, for their constant support, the whole United Nations family, and particularly the Secretary-General, whose support in various forms has undoubtedly made it possible to advance towards implementation of the Almaty Programme.

I also thank the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, mandated by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General, to organize this review and coordinate the preparatory work, and I congratulate it on the clarity and effectiveness of this action.

I conclude with an African saying: When two elephants fight, it is the savannah grass that suffers. In the context of globalization, the Almaty Programme of Action is certainly not a magic wand, but its full and active implementation will make it possible for the landlocked developing countries not to be the grass crushed in the vacant lot of globalization, by permitting them to take part in global economic competition. That would be justice.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Minister for Foreign Affairs of India.

Mr. Mukherjee (India): The Almaty Programme of Action has resulted in a clear acknowledgement of the special needs and problems of landlocked developing countries, including the need for sustained international support to address them.

Equally important is the understanding that any effective solution must address the constraints and challenges faced by the transit developing countries neighbouring landlocked developing countries.

Yet our review shows that the devil does indeed lie in the details of the implementation.

Despite their best efforts, landlocked developing countries have not been able to take full advantage of the global growth witnessed since Almaty, and many of them remain marginalized from the international trading system.

Modernization of trade facilitation and transit procedures remains pending, primarily due to lack of their own resources and capacities and financial and technical assistance.

Thus it is no coincidence that of the 31 landlocked developing countries 16 continue to be classified as least developed countries. The current global food and energy crises have made their problems more acute.

It is therefore imperative that we utilize this opportunity to make a genuine assessment of challenges to the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Various reports by the United Nations and other bodies clearly identify lack of resources as a key barrier to implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Transit transport infrastructure projects involve high investments and long gestation periods, usually with low rates of return and comparative higher risks.

Naturally, it becomes difficult to attract private sector investment, particularly in countries where the private sector itself is not well developed.

Official development assistance (ODA) therefore remains critical for long-term funding. Yet, regrettably, ODA to the transport sector has actually fallen in the landlocked developing countries.

Moreover, infrastructure development needs to be complemented by efficient storage and logistics management systems and integrated information and communication networks. It also requires seamless integration of transport infrastructures of landlocked countries with the transit transport infrastructure of their transit developing countries, as well as with any

special transit transport corridor. Inter-modal transport also needs to be encouraged. All these require significant financial and technical assistance, as well as capacity-building.

Transit developing countries themselves face many development challenges. Yet they take on additional costs of providing transit transport facilities to landlocked countries even when areas in their own countries remain as remote from the sea as those of the landlocked countries. While the transit developing countries undertake this in a spirit of cooperation and friendship, they also need to be provided enhanced international support.

Other assistance envisaged in the Almaty Programme of Action has also been limited. Debt relief has not translated into additional resources, since much of the debt was already in arrears. Technology transfer has not been effective. We need to put in place a proactive mechanism that promotes technology transfer at concessional and preferential rates.

Enhancing international trade from landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries is crucial for their development. This requires an enabling international environment. Developed countries need to provide enhanced market access to products of special interest to landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries. The overarching principle of the special and differential treatment remains a categorical imperative.

Trade and transit issues are inextricably linked. Enhancement of trade facilitation, customs control efficiency and simplification of documentation and procedures for international trade require technical and financial assistance.

We must also remain cognizant that there are significant regional variations in implementing the Almaty Programme, and one size cannot fit all. Bilateral initiatives, where appropriate, also play a key role.

The enhanced focus on challenges facing landlocked developing countries has highlighted that there are regions within some developing countries that have difficulty in accessing global markets on account of geography or political boundaries. This lack of easy access to the sea and remoteness from international markets causes them to face challenges similar to those faced by landlocked developing countries. It would be appropriate to recognize the need and call for cooperation to meet the special transit requirements of landlocked regions of a country.

We have excellent historical ties with our landlocked neighbours, and accord the highest importance to further strengthening these links, including through cooperation on transit transport issues. We have also contributed to the development efforts of other landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries as part of South-South cooperation.

Landlocked countries with a contiguous border with us have special bilateral cooperation agreements for easy transit of their goods through India.

Regional initiatives to improve transit connectivity and intraregional trade are equally a priority for us. We also continue to join our landlocked neighbours in financial partnerships for infrastructure development, and make available technical, economic and capacity-building support.

We hope that this midterm review will invigorate the implementation of the Almaty Programme, including the provision of enhanced assistance from the international community.

Before I conclude let me thank Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and his team for the excellent work they are doing, and their efforts in making this review meeting a success.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hans Winkler, State Secretary for European and International Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Winkler (Austria): First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to address the Assembly in this debate on landlocked developing countries, which I consider not only timely, but also of the utmost importance.

Despite real progress towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in the area of poverty reduction, it is still the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island States that are the most adversely affected. They need our paramount attention,

as the relevant reports on the implementation and progress of the MDGs point out.

The year 2008 has seen a number of important events on development cooperation with participation at the political level, including many Heads of State and Government. I personally attended the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, both held in Accra earlier this year, which confirmed that the group of States that we are addressing today indeed require our special attention.

I also recall the Africa and Millennium Development Goal summits of the General Assembly, held a few days ago, which the Austrian Federal President and the Austrian Federal Chancellor attended.

Moreover, we are currently preparing the Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, which will take place at the end of November through the beginning of December.

All these high-level meetings would have been of no avail if not followed by concrete action. Therefore, it is high time now to substantially increase our common efforts — developed and developing countries alike — in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for all countries and peoples in the world.

Austria views the Almaty Programme of Action as a significant landmark in the recognition of the special needs and problems of landlocked developing countries. Our common goal must be to effectively integrate them into the world economy. That is a precondition for poverty-reduction and achievement of the MDGs.

At the midpoint of the Almaty Programme of Action we must take stock of where we stand in our common efforts to support landlocked developing countries in overcoming their development constraints.

Thirty-one landlocked developing countries in the world continue to face serious constraints in their efforts to achieve the goals of fighting poverty and elevating the living standards of their population. According to the 2007-2008 Human Development Index rankings, eight of the 12 countries with the lowest Human Development Index scores are landlocked, 10 landlocked countries are classified as among those with low human development, and not a single one of the non-European landlocked countries is classified among those with high human development.

One reason why economic and human development indicators for landlocked countries are generally so much worse than those for their maritime neighbours is their dependence on other countries' transit routes for access to overseas markets.

Landlocked developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa are especially adversely affected. The isolation from world markets, poor infrastructure, communication problems and logistics delays significantly increase the costs for African firms and impose an additional burden on their economies. The cost penalties borne by the private sector, particularly for transport and energy, are daunting, more than wiping out any comparative advantages these countries might have, such as lower labour costs.

Allow me to share Austria's experience as a landlocked, predominantly mountainous country in the middle of Europe. Our geopolitical situation after the Second World War — at the border between two different political and economic systems — proved to be an obstacle to trade and economic integration. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the removal of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Austria's membership in the European Union, from 1995, and the enlargement of the European Union towards Eastern Europe provided Austria with unprecedented economic opportunities and welfare for its population.

Our example shows that not only the right economic and social environment but also enabling geopolitical conditions are required to further regional integration and cooperation. Today, as a member of the European Union, Austria has access to all ports of European Union member States across roads, railways and inland navigation. Transit and access to the Black Sea ports are ensured on the basis of the Danube Convention, which regulates and guarantees free traffic on the Danube.

During the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which took place from 1973 through 1982, Austria chaired the group of the so-called geographically disadvantaged States, most of them landlocked developing countries. In this position, Austria represented their interests, mainly concentrating on participation in research regarding the use of marine resources, representation in the entities

of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the question of transit rights and access to the sea.

European integration provided valuable assistance to us. Joint planning of transport facilities and routes, as well as collective financial aid to support projects in the infrastructure sector, makes it possible to combat the negative environmental effects of transit traffic.

Because of our own history and experience, Austria focuses its development cooperation with partners in landlocked developing countries such as Burkina Faso, Uganda, Ethiopia, Bhutan, Moldova and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Special emphasis is given to supporting regional infrastructure development in sub-Saharan Africa and to contributing to the European Union-Africa Trust Fund on Infrastructure.

On the basis of our own experience, and because this is supported by statistics and facts, I would like to stress the significance of regional integration. It cannot be stressed enough. It provides security and peace, and prevents crisis through common political and economic stability and a common legal framework, which constitute the basic prerequisites for transit and free access to the sea.

With that in mind, I conclude, Mr. President, by wishing you — and us all — a successful meeting.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.